

Chinese herbal strategies for

Colds & Flu

Chinese herbology offers a wealth of treatment options when dealing with the common cold and associated flu, coughs, sinusitis, etc. It is, however, a different approach and process than most people are accustomed to from using standard Western over the counter cold remedies. The purpose of this article is to present general information about using Chinese herbs for colds that may assist you in maximizing their effectiveness.

Confusion

The first thing I notice when I get a cold is a rapid inability to think clearly about what to do. This may be the common cold's greatest weapon: create confusion and disable effective action. It is all the more frustrating for me as I, literally, live with a complete pharmacy and I KNOW an herbal solution is in front of me. Yet, the lack of clarity makes it difficult to see the solution before my eyes. We tend to be overwhelmed by headcold symptoms and the resulting confusion reinforces those very symptoms.



My first recommendation, then, is to save this article. Put it someplace where you can re-read it when necessary. My second recommendation is to call me for phone advice when you first notice the cloud of confusion descending. It is much easier for me to make effective suggestions early (compared to days or weeks into) the general cold process. Keeping this article handy and calling for advice can be a very useful counter to the cold's potent confusion. The rest of this article is about general herb dosage, formula, and prevention strategies.

Formulas

There are dozens of Chinese herbal formulas that can be useful for colds and flu. The most effective formula is targeted to the stage of the cold process (initial, middle, or lingering) and/or the depth of the symptoms (superficial: runny nose, etc.; *medium*: cough, sinusitis, etc.; deep: lung phlegm, infection, etc.).

For the initial stage and superficial symptoms there are many general formulas, such as Ilex 15, Yin Chiao, Gan Mao Ling. They all have similar ingredients and target the superficial layers of the body trying to resolve the symptoms and prevent further penetration. Usually, these formulas are most effective in the first one to five days of symptoms. During this time if symptoms improve, continuing with the initial formula may be all that is necessary. If, however, after several days the symptoms worsen or stay the same, it may be time for a different formula. This is the time I begin making custom granule formulas based on the presenting signs and symptoms. With increasing symptoms people tend to manifest different patterns. Some people get coughs, others get sinus problems, others may get ear symptoms – or some combination of everything. A custom formula can focus the herbs more effectively on the areas involved.

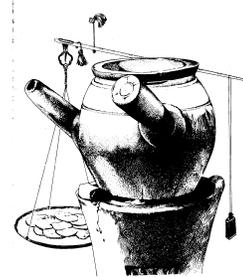
Timing

The most important variable I have noticed is how soon the first dose is after initial symptoms

arise. Even waiting a few hours between that noticeable scratchy tickle at the back of my throat and the first herb dose decreases the herb effectiveness. In order to be most effective this simply means having a general cold formula on hand. Taking the herbs at this most initial stage can mean the difference between a light case of sniffles for a few days and a full blown headcold (or worse) that can last for a week or more.

Dosage

I usually recommend the ITM product Ilex 15 for my clients and will give dosages for this product for adults. Call if you have questions about other formula or child dosages (which vary by age and size).



Preventive Dose: 2-3 tablets 2-3x/day.

A highly effective strategy is to use a general formula before symptoms arise. There are two levels of this approach: likely exposure and exposure. Likely exposure scenarios involve exposure to large numbers of people, typically during cold and flu season. Airplane travel is the ultimate example providing a perfect breeding and transmission environment. Similar situations might be concerts, sporting events, etc. Exposure scenarios involve being in close contact with someone who is definitely sick: co-workers, family, and friends. In both these situations it might be useful to take a general formula even before initial symptoms arise.

First Symptoms Dose: 3 tablets 3-4x/day.

Once symptoms arise it is an indicator that body resistance is struggling to ward off the cold. Either start with a general formula stronger than or increase the preventative dose.

Increasing Symptoms Dose: 3-4 tablets 3-5x/day.

If basic headcold symptoms increase then the dosage needs to follow that increase. Maintaining a 'preventive' or 'first symptom' dose will likely not be effective if the symptoms continue to worsen. If the symptoms are worsening, but not moving deeper into the throat or lungs, the general formula may still be effective IF it is used at a higher dose.

Remember: If you follow these dosing guidelines from prevention through increasing symptoms for one to five days and symptoms are worsening or just maintaining it may be best to switch to another, more customized formula.

Insurance Dose: 2-3 tablets 2-3x/day for 3-5 days.

Whether you are using an initial general formula or have switched to custom granules, it may be very helpful to continue taking herbs for two to three days after symptoms resolve. Even though symptoms have cleared, our bodies may not be back to full strength. This is a common time to relapse or become re-exposed and have another cold episode in the following seven to ten days. Typically the dose can be reduced for this stage.

Other Herbal Formulas

If you are already taking an herbal formula for conditions other than a cold, it is usually best to stop taking it and focus primarily on the cold remedy for the initial cold stage. If necessary, the other formula can be reintroduced toward the end of the cold process at a lower dosage. Calculating when to reintroduce a formula and at what proportion to the cold remedy varies with each person and episode. In general each formula should be proportionate to the symptom/condition priority. Always feel free to check in with me at this stage.

Non-Herbal Factors

Chinese herbs can provide very effective support and relief during cold and flu conditions. However, herbs cannot substitute for taking good care of ourselves. I find **REST** is often overlooked as a crucial factor for recovery. Eliminating all **DAIRY** products with the initial symptoms also helps. Dairy products generally increase mucous production and the body is already struggling with too much mucous. The most important factor is to **LISTEN** to our body/mind. Too often we are so busy that we can't hear or feel what our body needs to heal. Slow down, rest, listen, eat well... all these factors allow the herbal formulas to be more effective.

Colds and flus happen. How we respond to them determines their intensity, length, and disruptiveness. This article provides some general information on using Chinese herbal formulas. Two key points to remember: Keep a general formula on hand before symptoms arise; call if a cloud of confusion descends.

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