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Treating the Common Cold

by Jake P. Fratkin

One of the great contributions Chinese medicine offers the West is the availability of herbs and herbal formulas that directly attack viral heat toxins causing the common cold, influenza, upper respiratory infections, and common pediatric diseases. Here, western medicine is at a total loss, offering at best bed rest and fluids, and at worst, antibiotics.

Antibiotics are ineffective against viral infections, doing nothing to alter the severity of symptoms or the time frame of an infection. However, they do negatively impact the body's immune system by destroying the beneficial gut bacteria that neutralize harmful toxins. By destroying gut bacteria, one's immune system becomes depleted, doing the work that would have been done by beneficial bacteria.

While western herbology offers several antiviral herbs such as echinacea and dandelion (*Taraxacum*), the Chinese herbal materia medica has at least 30 strong medicinal herbs that can destroy pathogenic viruses. Modern clinical research in China

has validated their efficacy against the viruses that cause common cold, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, respiratory [problems], encephalitis, meningitis, herpes, and hepatitis. Herbs with antiviral effects used in the classical formulas included *Lonicera* (*Jin Yin Hua*), *Forsythia* (*Lian Qiao*), *Taraxacum* (*Pu Gong Ying*), *Isatis* (*Ban Lan Gen*), *Isatis* (*Da Qing Ye*), *Oldenlandia* (*Bai Hua She She Cao*), *Smilax* (*Tu Fu Ling*) and *Lasiosphaera* (*Ma Bo*).

Although not discussed in the classical literature, certain herbs have emerged in the last fifty years that are also effective against viruses. These include *Ilex* (*Mao Dong Qing*), *Andrographis* (*Chuan Xin Lian*), *Evodia* (*San Cha Ku*), *Houttuynia* (*Yu Xing Cao*), *Patrinia* (*Bai Jiang Cao*), *Polygonum* (*Hu Zhang*) and *Viola* (*Zi Hua Di Ding*).

When we evaluate the appropriateness of an herbal formula in fighting a viral disease, one benchmark is the inclusion of one or more of the herbs listed above.

Spotlight: Suan Zao Ren

by **Natha Surinsuk, L.Ac.**



Natha Surinsuk grew up with eastern philosophy and eastern medicine from a very young age. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychobiology from the University of California, Los Angeles before completing her TCM training at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in San Diego, CA. Natha now practices in the Los Angeles area.

During the current period of economic uncertainty, stress and anxiety plague the lives of many people. Therefore, it is good to know that nature has a solution for us. Relaxation and restful sleep can be found in the seeds of the thorny deciduous tree called Wild Jujube, also known as Spiny Jujube or Wild Zizyphus. We best know them as *Suan Zao Ren*.

Originally native to southern Asia in the regions of Syria, northern India, central and southern China, this small shrub has been widely cultivated for over 4,000 years with over 400 known cultivators (cultivated plants that possess unique characteristics from others of the same species and also retain their distinctiveness when propagated.) Outside of Asia, the jujube can now be found in part of Russia, northern Africa, southern Europe, the Middle East, and southwestern United States. It also bears a biblical mention (Judges 9:15) and is the second most common tree in the Arava Valley of Israel. The success of their vast cultivation can be attributed to their unique ability to endure a wide range of temperatures from very hot summers to fairly cold winters with temperatures as low as -28(insert degree sign) F. Also tolerant of rainfalls and droughts and able to grow in soil of high acidity or

alkalinity, the plant is extremely low maintenance. However, the Spiny Jujube thrives in sandy, well-drained soil in a sunny and warm location with adequate winter pruning, which in turn yields the best quality fruits. The flowering season spans several months of late spring into summer, but the flowers themselves are only receptive to pollen for one day or less. Hence, most jujube cultivators produce fruit without cross-pollination. After the fruit ripens in late autumn or early winter, it is picked and dried in the sunlight, then pitted and shelled to obtain the ripe kernel of *Suan Zao Ren*. Much of this process is done in the Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces of China.

Suan Zao Ren first appeared in the Chinese pharmacopeia via *The Divine Farmer's Materia Medica Classic (Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing)* around 300 B.C. The seeds can be used unprepared or stir-fried, then often crushed before taken in a decoction or alone as a powder. Due to its sweet taste and neutral temperate, it nourishes the Heart and Liver Blood as well as nourishes yin to arrest sweating. The main function of this medicinal seed is to calm and stabilize the Shen. Therefore, *Suan Zao Ren* is most often used in cases of insomnia, irritability, palpitations, forgetfulness and abnormal sweating due to deficiency. It is also a prophylactic for altitude sickness. Modern research from China shows versatility in the medicinal use of this ancient herb. One study shows improved liver functions as well as improved quality of sleep in chronic hepatitis B patients with insomnia. Other research suggests this medicinal seed has sedative and

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hypnotic effects on the nervous system, protective ischemic effects on cerebral damages, and has anti-neoplastic effects on cancer cells. Other observed effects are muscle relaxation, reduced pain sensation, increased pain tolerance, and prolonged lowered blood pressure. The oil extracts of the seed has also been shown to decrease levels of blood cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein and triglycerides, and inhibit platelet aggregation. Despite its strong medicinal effects, this mild natured herb is relatively safe to use long term and for children. Reported adverse effects from inappropriate use include fever with aversion to cold, cold sweat, and joint pain. Western herbalists are also considering the Wild Jujube Seed as an alternative to Kava Kava and Valerian due to the latter two herbs' possible negative impact on liver functions.

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Clinical Application of Chinese Herbal Products

A number of Chinese herbal products exist to treat viral colds. The clinician chooses a product based on the stage of the infection, location (nose, throat, lungs, etc), predominant symptoms and severity. The following herbal formulas can be used at various stages of a cold.

[More information on the formulas discussed in this article can be found in my book, Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines, The Clinical Desk Reference (Shya, 2001). Product numbers following the title allow for easier reference.]

YIN QIAO JIE DU WAN (1B2-4) The *Yin Qiao San* formula, developed by Wu Jutang in 1798, was originally intended as a pediatric formula for measles and chicken pox, working to push heat toxins out to the surface. In modern times, it is a very popular formula for the early stage of a wind-heat common cold, marked by sore throat, slight fever, and slight stuffy nose. It can be used alone, or in combination with stronger antiviral formulas such as *Gan Mao Ling*.

SANG JU YIN (1B2-4) was also developed by Wu Jutang, and many of the herbal ingredients are similar to *Yin Qiao San*. It addresses wind-heat entering the lungs, causing a dry cough.

GAN MAO LING (1A3-3) means "Common Cold Efficacious-Remedy". This version by Herbal Times is similar to *Yin Qiao San* and *Sang Ju Yin*, offering a strong formula for wind-heat cough with fever and chills.

GAN MAO JIE DU WAN (1B1-1) is based on the popular patent medicine *Gan Mao Ling*. In this

formula, 75% of the formula uses herbs with strong anti-viral properties, including two unusual herbs from Taiwan, *gang mei gen* (*Radix Ilicis Asprellae*) and *san cha ku* (*Radix-Ramus Evodiae Leptae*). It is an effective formula for viral heat-toxins, and can be used alone, or in combination with wind-dispersing formulas such as *Yin Qiao San* or *Sang Ju Yin*. It is the herbal product I use the most for common cold and flu.

CHUAN XIN LIAN (2A2-2) is an effective three-herb combination for infections of the throat or lymph glands. It's uses *Andrographis* (*Chuan Xin Lian*) (50%), *Taraxacum* (*Pu Gong Ying*) (25%), and *Isatis* (*Ban Lan Gen*) (25%). This formula is very good for severe sore throat, and can be used alone, or combined with *Yin Qiao San* for sore throat in common cold. In cases where sore throat is due to streptococcus bacterial infections, *Pu Ji* can be combined with **HUANG LIAN JIE DU WAN** (2B1-8), a strong antibacterial formula dating back to Wang Tao, 752. This combination is as effective as western antibiotics.

PU JI XIAO DU YIN (1B3-1) was created by Luo Tianyi during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). This large and complicated formula (14 herbs) may have originally been used to fight diphtheria, an epidemic disease that causes fatal swelling of the throat. Clinically, it is helpful for flu or common cold marked by swollen lymphatic glands and sore throat. I often use it in young children with chronic swollen neck lymph glands or tonsillitis. For tonsillitis, combine with *Chuan Xin Lian*.

CHAI GE JIE JI WAN (1B1-2) is used when the pathogenic toxins have moved into the *shaoyang* stage, including the lymphatic system. Whereas *Pu Ji*

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addresses viral heat toxins in the lymphatics, this formula is used once the heat toxins have cleared, with remaining symptoms of fatigue and chills without fever. It originated with Tao Hua in 1445, and is an elaboration of Zhong Zhongjing's *Xiao Chai Hu Tang*.

When strong nasal symptoms accompany a common cold, one can combined a product like *Gan Mao Jie Du Wan* or *Yin Qiao San* with any of the following: *BI YAN WAN*, *PE MIN KAN WAN*, or *XIN YI WAN*.

For prevention of cold, one can use ***YU PING FENG WAN*** (12A1-8), a formula attributed to Zhu Zhenheng (Danxi), 1481. This formula is useful to prevent the catching of common cold, and also prepares one before and during the allergy season.

These formulas offer an excellent arsenal for treating the various presentations of common viral

colds, whether they be mild or serious, acute or chronic. Once a viral cold proceeds into the lungs, cough will develop. There are actually 7 stages of cough due to exogenous invasion, and in a future article I would like to address appropriate herbal formulas.

When one considers a weak or absent arsenal used by Western physicians, it is easy to see that the antiviral Chinese herbal products are one of the most useful contributions of Chinese medicine.

Jake Paul Fratkin, OMD, L.Ac., has been in the practice of Oriental medicine since 1978. He is the author of several books, including Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines: The Clinical Desk Reference, and is the editor-organizer of Wu and Fischer's Practical Therapeutics of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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