

[IMAGE]

Top 5 Herbal Formulas for Health and Wellness

By Dr. Stephanie Pina and Dr. Dan Wen

Why do the Chinese have a reputation for living long, healthy lives? A rich history of using Chinese herbs may play a role. Here are five of the most popular herbal formulas and how they help promote health and wellness in the body.

Modern Western pharmacology tends to focus on finding the single molecule that cures a disease. In contrast, Chinese medicine often utilizes herbal formulas that blend many agents to address underlying imbalances that may cause disease, while aiding in symptom relief - a "shotgun" approach that has been practiced in Asia for thousands of years. Medical practitioners all over the world have begun to incorporate more Chinese formulas into their practices to treat common, everyday conditions. Whereas raw herbs were once sent home with the patient and made into teas, today there are a variety of forms available over the counter, in practitioners' offices and in health food stores.

Herbal Theory at a Glance

According to Chinese medicine, herbs and formulas have affinities to certain organ channels. Each herb has significance in a formula, similar to the way a pharmaceutical medication has a specific action. An herb can affect multiple organ systems, making its way through the body to help restore balance. It has been suggested that early Chinese herbalists could follow the energy of herbs through the body, which helped determine their medicinal function.

Chinese herbalist sorts through herbal medicines. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Chinese medicine has become much more mainstream in its use and indications. Over-the-counter products are now used based on their modern-day disease indications, and are used in their traditional applications for treating imbalances in organ channels. While modern medicine has tried to extract the most active components of herbs in an attempt to enhance their effects, Chinese herbal formulas continue to combine whole herbs. It is common to see herbs and minerals such as licorice, ginger, simple sugar, rice and salt added to help make the other components in a formula work better. Often, simple base formulas are used together or individual herbs are added. Here are five common Chinese herbal formulas that address basic health issues.

A Basic Formula

(Gui Zhi Tang)

Graphic showing A, B and C. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark This formula's traditional use stems back to the classics, where it was one of the first formulas used to fight off signs of the common cold. It works by pushing pathogens out of the body, primarily through sweating. This formula has been modified to be a component of so many formulas that many modern patent medicine books do not recognize it individually as a formula. The major ingredient, cinnamon, has an overall immune-boosting quality that helps promote the movement of other herbs through channels.

Digestive Aid

(Ping Wei San)

Graphic showing small intestine. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark This formula is one of many available that work to tonify the stomach and improve digestion and elimination. It is often used when there is stomach upset, bloating and sluggish bowels due to overconsumption of cold foods and drinks. It has been used to help relieve fullness in the chest and abdomen. This can be commonly seen when people attempt to eat healthy and suddenly increase their intake of raw food, eat only salads or drink lots of iced beverages. The formula works by warming the digestive organs as a method of restoring function and helping decrease the feeling of heaviness. Similar formulas are used when people present with more heat signs like burning sensations when eating, or they alternate between loose stools and constipation.

PMS and Mental Support

(Xiao Yao San)

Graphic showing profile of man's head. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark This formula, one of the most popular Chinese formulas used in America, focuses on supporting the mind/body balance. It has been given to women who suffer from PMS with emotional difficulties connected to their cycle. This formula soothes the mind and promotes blood movement, which also helps relieve pain and cramping.

Energy Support

(Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang)

Graphic showing rising sun. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark This formula traditionally has been used to help strengthen weakened and debilitated patients by tonifying their core energy. It is like fixing the foundation of a house below ground so new improvements can be made above ground. An indication for this formula is when there is not enough strength to hold the body up and there is a feeling that things are sinking or collapsing. This formula has been used with various types of prolapses, frequent urination, loose stools, bleeding problems like anemia, and generalized weakness. It is used to help boost the body for many conditions and is often combined with other formulas for that purpose.

Liver Support

(Xiao Chai Hu Tang)

Graphic showing profile of a human liver. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark This formula has been used in Chinese medicine for hundreds of years and has kept its ancient indications while acquiring modern-day applications. It is one of the main formulas mentioned in the *Shang Hun Lung*, a classic text on herbal formulations from the Han dynasty, written between 202 B.C. and 221 A.D. Traditionally, it has been used for lingering colds that persist for more than five days with alternating fever and chills. It also has been used for women who catch colds right before or on the first day of menstruation. It is good for people who are more susceptible to illness during changes, like the beginning of a menstrual cycle. Recently, ongoing studies at UC San Diego and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center have demonstrated its positive results on liver function for patients with hepatitis C. Over the long term, it has helped improve liver enzymes and general fatigue from chronic illness. This formula continues to be a part of many clinical trials in the U.S. and overseas.

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