

Boosting Immunity with Chinese Herbal Medicine

The current global COVID-19 pandemic has led to high levels of anxiety in the community; many people are looking to Chinese Herbal Medicine for its potential to boost immunity and manage symptoms, especially for fevers, sore throats and respiratory dysfunction. The question is, can Chinese Herbal Medicine treat the symptoms of COVID-19? ⁽¹⁾



The short answer is yes, but please don't misinterpret that as meaning that "Chinese Medicine can cure this disease". It simply means that, with the skilful application of Chinese Medicine, we can be pro-active, we have additional tools to fight the virus and to manage distressing flu-like symptoms. What we can say is that many herbs have been used for centuries to:

- support lung function
- reduce fever
- inhibit coughing
- resolve phlegm
- increase blood circulation
- promote good sleep and reduce anxiety

From the scientific point of view, the immunomodulatory properties of botanical medicinals are well-documented.⁽²⁾ It is therefore valid to state that Chinese Herbal Medicine can boost the immune system. Various individual herbs used in Chinese Herbal Medicine have been shown to have immunomodulatory effects such as stimulatory effects on immune cells and cytokine production and inhibitory effects on inflammation and allergenic responses.⁽³⁾ As just one example, the herb Astragalus (Huang Qi) has been shown to have "... antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, immunoregulatory, anticancer, hypolipidemic, antihyperglycemic, hepatoprotective, expectorant, and diuretic effects ..." and "... was associated with a significant age-reversal effect in the immune system."⁽⁴⁾

Chinese Herbal Medicine practitioners rarely if ever use an individual herb but rather, we use formulas consisting of multiple single herbs, usually in very specific proportions. These traditional formulas will often be modified to suit the specific presenting symptoms of any one patient.

Although COVID-19 is obviously a brand new disease, it is treading a well worn pathway. Chinese Medicine has had strategies for the treatment of exterior pathogenic invasion for at least two thousand years of well documented history. A COVID-19 infection is regarded as a Wind Heat invasion and a wide range of herbal formulas are available in response.

A Chinese Medicine practitioner will never claim to be able to heal a particular disease. Rather, the aim of Chinese Medicine is to restore, maintain and promote health and wellbeing. We work with the body to build vitality and resolve the signs and symptoms of disharmony. Naturally we all have to comply with government guidelines in response to the current pandemic and to seek medical assistance when necessary, but in addition there is a place for fighting a cough or a fever with Chinese Herbal Medicine.

1. *How COVID-19 (2019-nCoV) is Currently Treated in China with TCM*

Compiled and Translated by John Chen; Edited by Michael Norris Published Feb 19th, 2020

2. *Stimulation of Tetanus Toxoid-Specific Immune Responses by a Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine*

Underwood JR, Chivers M, Dang TT, Licciard PV Vaccine (2009) Nov 5;27(47)

3. *Traditional Chinese Medicine and Immune Regulation*

Ma HD, Deng YR, Tian Z, Lian ZX. Clin Rev Allergy Immunol. 2013 Jun;44(3):229-41

4. *Anti Ageing Implications of Astragalus Membranaceus (Huangqi): A Well-Known Chinese Tonic*

Ping Liu, Haiping Zhao, and Yumin Luo Ageing and Disease. 2017 Dec; 8(6): 868-886