

Herb FAQ

Q : Why Chinese Herbs?

When herbs are added to acupuncture, frequently there is additive or even synergistic effects. Herbs can do what acupuncture needles may not do, or what acupuncture accomplishes slowly; for instance, to warm you up if you are too cold, or to cool you off if you are too hot.

Q : How is Chinese herbal medicine different from the western herbal/nutritional supplements?

Practitioners usually mix formulas and single herbs for each individual, based on not only one's history of present illness, but tongue and pulse examination. It is personalized medicine, in contrast to protocol-based practice.

Q : Can you tell me more about Chinese medicine?

It started 3000+ years ago, based on a completely different medical system. It is a natural and more philosophical way to look at human body, health and illness. Its clinical effectiveness has been proven not only in China, but now in more than one hundred countries in the world. Common theories include Yin-Yang concept, 5 elements, Zhang Fu (visceral organs), channels or meridians, etc.

Q : Why can't I just order online or obtain Chinese herbs from local asian grocery stores?

One reason is better quality control. Dr. Sheng obtains herbs from CGMP manufacturers only. Second reason is patients are examined by Dr. Sheng personally and herbs are prescribed per patients' individual body conditions.

To pick single herbs or herbal formulas on your own based on your subjective complaints often fail to deliver desired results.

Q : Can I share my herbs with my family members or friends with same problems?

It is not recommended sharing your herb with anybody else. In Chinese medicine the same complaints can be treated very differently. A proper diagnosis first is necessary first.

Q : What about drug-herb interactions?

The potential is always there but in reality it happens very rarely. Dr. Sheng will review your list of prescription drugs first and make certain modifications. As mentioned earlier, Chinese herbal practice relies on the team work. Each ingredient is present in small amount. The number one rule in toxicology is "dose makes toxin".

Dr. Sheng recommends using Chinese herbs over a period of weeks to 2-3 months. Unlike many prescription drugs are recommended for the rest of your life.

Q : Are there particular things to be watched?

If you are high blood pressure, monitor your BP. If you are on blood thinners, watch for easy bruising or signs of bleeding.

Q : How do I take the herbs?

Our office provides processed herbs which are prepared through scientifically proven extraction and concentration processes. Mix the herbal powder with warm or hot water to make herbal tea and take it as directed.

Q : What is the frequency and duration of herbal usage?

Our standard recommendation is 4 leveled scoops (scoops provided) twice a day, or about 4-5 grams of herbs each serving. In some acute conditions or in the beginning of your treatment, we may recommend 3 times a day to get quick results. You may use herbs from one week to 2 or 3 months. Some patients do take herbs long term if they have a very chronic condition.

Your body and health conditions do change, therefore, we ask patients on herbs to return for follow up visit in three months for Dr. Sheng to evaluate your condition and make any necessary changes to the herbal composition.

Q : How safe are Chinese herbs?

The processed and concentrated herbs have been through quality control measures such as proper identification, quality check, screening for pesticide residues and heavy metals, etc.. These herbs have been used for several hundred to thousand years. Do use the herbs under the guidance and supervision of an experienced practitioner.

Q : Are there examples of Chinese herbs causing harms?

There are two bad examples in the past two decades.

1. Ephedra in Metabolife for weight loss causing rapid heart beat and possibly responsible for some death. However, that was the result of deliberate misuse and abuse on the part of manufacturers and users. Ephedra stimulates the sympathetic nervous system which causes rapid heart beat.
 2. Another example involved a weight loss clinic in Belgium prescribing an Aristolochic acid containing herb Guan Fangchi. Long term use led to kidney failure and kidney cancer.
- Both examples illustrated the use of herbs for weight loss with either larger than recommended quantities and a very long duration. The herbs mentioned above have been banned.

Q : What if I miss one or a few doses?

We strongly encourage compliance for better outcome since there is definitely a dose-effect relationship, however, do not panic and there is no need to take more in a given day to make up if you should miss a few doses. Resume as instructed.

Q : What are the common side effects?

There might be very mild G-I or digestive tract intolerance such as nausea or diarrhea. Take your herbs after meals in beginning. If herbs do not bother your stomach, you may take them with an empty stomach. Sometimes I may ask you to decrease the amount from 4, to 3 or 2 scoops each serving for better tolerance.

Q : What if I feel too excited or too energetic after taking herbs or if herbs bother my sleep?

Some patients are more sensitive to the energy boosting herbs. If that is the case, take the herbs in the morning and in early afternoon before 3pm.



Q : What about allergic reactions to herbs?

Very rarely would a few patients have unpleasant experience with the herbs. Please stop the herbs immediately and contact our office. There is always idiosyncratic reaction to any prescription drugs or supplements which maybe difficult to explain. I may suggest you re-challenge with a very small dose at a later time if you agree.

Q : What can Chinese herbs help cancer patients?

As a board certified oncologist with over two decades of Chinese herbal experiences, I recommend herbs for symptom relief, immune system boosting, speeding up bone marrow recovery, dealing with a number of chemo-induced side effects, beyond what can be accomplished by western medicine. There were cases where Chinese herbs helped stabilizing cancer for up to 12 months in my practice.

Q : Do herbs interfere with chemotherapeutic effects?

We recommend that you do not take herbs with chemotherapy on the same day. Most chemotherapeutic drugs have a relatively short half life in human bodies.

Q : Do insurance policies cover Chinese herbs?

No. Check with your flexible spending account or health savings account, you might be able to pay for your herbs through those accounts.

This information is not intended to medically prescribe or promote the sale of any herbs or supplements over prescription medicines or to replace qualified medical health care. The practice assumes no responsibility if you prescribe for yourself or if you change the recommended dosages on your own. If you have, or think you have, a condition which requires medical attention you should immediately seek help from medical professionals. FDA has not evaluated this statement and these products are not intended for prevention, treatment, or cure of any disease.