

CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine has long been used to prevent as well as to cure diseases. However, the potential toxicity of Chinese herbal medicine has not been recognized by many people. Because herbs are often considered to be “natural”, users are unaware of their potential hazards. Nevertheless, there have been numerous severe and even fatal cases of herbal poisoning as a result of product contamination, adulteration, and misuse.

The lack of government regulation in the purity and safety of Chinese herbs further increase their potential dangers. Studies and research are currently underway to provide more information on the safety of Chinese herbal medicine, their mode of action, and effectiveness.

To protect you and your family against the potential hazards of Chinese herbal medicine, keep the following points in mind:

1. Recognize the different forms of Chinese herbal medicine: pills, capsules, powder, paste, broth, tea, and medicine-wine. These products may contain contaminants such as mercury, lead, and arsenic which are toxic. Some may be adulterated with western medicine or other ingredients that have been banned by FDA (Food and Drug Administration). Ingestion of these contaminated or adulterated products may result in serious health problems such as kidney or liver failure, and even death.

2. Recognize the symptoms of herbal poisoning: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, blurred vision, fainting spells, numbness, general weakness, or hallucinations. If you develop any of these symptoms, **stop** taking the herbal preparations and see your doctor immediately.
3. Check the ingredient list for possible allergies. Some herbal preparations may contain sugar, alcohol, or other substances, which are unsuitable for persons with certain illnesses, e.g. diabetics.
4. Do not attempt to self-medicate. Improper dosage can be life threatening and may even result in death. Always consult a licensed and experienced herbal practitioner who is adequately trained in the use of traditional Chinese medicine.
5. Be aware of possible drug-drug interactions when used in combination with western medicine. Always let your doctor know what you are taking.

Even though Chinese herbal medicine have been safely used for thousands of years, they are not without harm. Until the safety and efficacy of Chinese herbal medicine are well researched and better understood, use them with caution.