



# NORTH AMERICAN TANG SHOU TAO

## TREATING THE H1N1 VIRUS WITH CHINESE MEDICINE

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2009 saw the rise of the H1N1 virus. Although we all witnessed the hysteria created by the mainstream media and healthcare establishments, the H1N1 virus, at least for now, has proven to be significantly less deadly than the plain old seasonal flu virus (influenza). As of the writing of this article, the Center for Disease Control reports 44,640 official or laboratory confirmed cases of H1N1 and 115,431 unofficial, or non-laboratory confirmed cases in the United States. Of those cases 10,837 resulted in deaths. Compare that to the seasonal flu, which according to a CDC estimate from 2009, annually affects 5-20% of the US population and causes an average of 36,171 deaths.



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preparing herbs

Numbers aside, the symptoms of either flu can make anyone miserable and can be dangerous for immune-compromised individuals of any age. Chinese Medicine is a powerful ally in both the treatment and prevention of these viruses.

In my clinic I have seen a number of cases of what I believe to be H1N1. As I am not doing any laboratory testing I cannot confirm these as official cases. During November, the peak of the H1N1 virus here, one MD I talked with told me that within San Diego County 90% of the flu that was being lab confirmed was indeed H1N1. During that month I saw approximately 25 people who presented with flu symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, chills, body aches, vomiting, and diarrhea. Of those cases, a conservative estimate of H1N1 would be twenty. In all cases the patients recovered without complication. There was quite a bit of variation in the recovery time and this was influenced by multiple factors including treatment frequency and patient compliance with herbal medicine. I saw a recovery period ranging from immediate to as long as two weeks. In most cases the patients were getting back to normal daily activities 2-5 days after the initial treatment and administration of herbs. Many practitioners of Chinese Medicine are having success in treating H1N1. A recent study using Chinese herbal medicine was conducted at Ditan Hospital in Beijing and resulted in a 75% cure rate in 117 patients with the H1N1 virus. This was a greater cure rate than they had with the Western antiviral drug Tamiflu. The herbs used were not disclosed in the study because they varied on a case by case basis.

One of my teachers at the Chinese Medicine University I attended taught me that you can truly judge someone's mastery of the medicine by how successfully they treat a common cold or flu. Chinese Medicine regards colds and flu viruses as Invasions of External Wind, one of Six External Evils. External Wind attempts to penetrate our body's natural defenses or Wei Qi. If the External Wind is stronger than our Wei Qi it will continue to penetrate inward towards the internal organs and our symptoms will correspondingly become more and more severe. External Wind is, by nature, fast moving and easily adaptable. It can easily blend with the other five External Evils of Cold, Heat, Dampness, Dryness, and Summer Heat to form a more complex pattern. These patterns and the symptoms associated with them can quickly change. It is for this reason that my teacher explained that diagnosing and treating External Invasion is not easy and it is possible to make the our patient's condition worse if our diagnosis and methods are incorrect.

Chinese Medicine has developed several elegant and profound theories that are very powerful in diagnosing and treating External Invasions. These include the Six Stage Theory from the Shan Han Lun (Treatise on Cold Induced Disorders), and the Theory of the Four Levels from the Wen Bing or Warm Disease School. As both of those theories are specific to treating External Invasion, their study is essential for anyone seeking to gain mastery over the treatment of colds and flu viruses using Chinese



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Medicine. Due to the sophistication of both those theories they are beyond the scope of this article. However, there are other, more basic diagnostic approaches that can be immediately incorporated by even the most novice practitioner.

Of paramount importance is correctly identifying which of the Six External Evils are involved in the pattern. In the case of colds and flu viruses, Wind will most always be present, but what else? Is it Hot or Cold? If it is Hot, is it Summer Heat? Are Damp or Dryness contributing factors? Based on our questioning and observation of the patient we must find clarity into these patterns and base our treatment protocols accordingly. For instance, if after assessing of the patient's signs and symptoms we determine that the patient has an Invasion of Wind, Heat, and Dampness, then the treatment that follows must have methods that dispel the Wind, cool the Heat, and dry the Dampness.

Another basic diagnostic approach that can provide further insight into a case is Eight Principle Pattern Identification or Ba Gong Diagnosis. The Eight Principle Patterns are four sets of opposite diagnostic criteria. They are: Interior and Exterior, Hot and Cold, Excess and Deficiency, Yin and Yang. In any of these four sets of opposites both parts may be present in a given situation. For instance, there may be excess *and* deficiency, or the nature of the illness may have interior *and* exterior aspects. Utilizing Ba Gong Diagnosis is again an opportunity to fine tune our awareness of what is happening with our patient according to some of the core concepts of Chinese Medicine. When we have gleaned insight into a patient's condition using both Ba Gong Diagnosis and identifying which of the Six Evils are present then our selection of acupuncture points and herbs will be easy. It is important that we always strive to deepen our understanding of these basic concepts through studying the Classics, observing the movements of nature, and for us, by paying attention to how these concepts apply to our experience of the Internal Arts.

Lastly, we cannot overlook the importance of using Chinese Medicine preventatively against seasonal colds and influenza. In relation to the H1N1 virus, Beijing Traditional Medical Hospital has introduced an herbal formula to specifically target that virus for those who think they will be exposed. The formula contains Jin Yin Hua (honeysuckle flower), Ban Lan Gen (isatis root), Bo He (mint), and Gan Cao (licorice). All the herbs are prescribed in dosages of three grams. Of course there are other herbal formulas we can use to keep our Wei Qi strong. Two commonly used formulas for that purpose are Yu Ping Fan San (Jade Windscreen Powder) and Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang (Boost the Middle Decoction). In addition to herbs and acupuncture, Chinese Medicine has given us many other gifts to keep us healthy in the midst of epidemic diseases. By living in accord with the seasonal recommendations from the Classics, the routine practice of qigong, regulation of our diet, and tempering our emotionality, we will surely stand strong against the complications of sickness.