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Hǔ Qián Wán (Hidden Tiger Pill) – Traditional Use, Pharmacological Effects, and Clinical Research

by John Chen, Ph.D., Pharm.D., O.M.D., L.Ac.

Pinyin Name: *Hu Qian Wan*

Literal Name: Hidden Tiger Pill

Alternate Name: Phellodendron Formula

Original Source: *Dan Xi Xin Fa* (Teachings of [Zhu] Dan-Xi) by Zhu Zhen-Heng in 1481

Composition

Huang Bo (Cortex *Phellodendri Chinensis*), *chao* (dry-fried) with liquor, 240g

Zhi Mu (Rhizoma *Anemarrhenae*), *chao* (dry-fried) with liquor, 60g

Gui Ban (Plastrum *Testudinis*), *zhi* (fried) with liquor, 120g

Shu Di Huang (Radix *Rehmanniae Praeparata*), 60g

Bai Shao (Radix *Paeoniae Alba*), 60g

Hu Gu (Os *Tigris*), *zhi* (fried) with liquid, 30g

Suo Yang (Herba *Cynomorii*), 45g

Chen Pi (Pericarpium *Citri Reticulatae*), 60g

Gan Jiang (Rhizoma *Zingiberis*), 15g

Note: *Hu Gu* (Os *Tigris*) is derived from an endangered animal, and is rarely used as a medicinal substance today. Its discussion here is included primarily for academic purposes, to reflect the historical use of this substance in its original formulation. Most herbal products today have removed it completely, or replaced it with *Zhu Gu* (Os *Porcus*) which has similar functions.

Dosage/Preparation/Administration

Grind the ingredients into powder and form into pills with grain-based alcohol. Today, this formula is usually prepared by mixing the powdered herbs with honey to form pills, which should weigh 10g each. Take 1 pill in the morning and at night with lightly-salted water or warm water.

Chinese Therapeutic Actions

1. Nourishes yin, and lowers and clears deficiency fire
2. Strengthens sinews and bones

Clinical Manifestations

Weakness and atrophy of the bones and tendons associated with Liver and Kidney yin-deficient fire: weakness and soreness of the lower back, legs, and knees; weakness of the sinews and bones; atrophy of the muscles, sinews, and bones in the extremities; a red tongue body with little coating, and a fine, weak pulse.

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Clinical Applications

Sequelae of polio or stroke with numbness, weakness, and atrophy of the extremities; atrophy and degeneration of the nervous system, atrophy and degeneration of the reproductive system, lumbago, tuberculosis of the knee, muscle atrophy, flaccidity of muscles and bones, post-stroke complications, chronic arthritis, lateral spinal sclerosis, and hypocalcemia.

Explanation

Hu Qian Wan (Hidden Tiger Pill) treats *wei zheng* (atrophy syndrome) with severe weakness and atrophy of the sinews and bones arising from Kidney yin deficiency, Liver blood deficiency, and yin-deficient fire. The Kidney controls the bones, and the Liver controls the sinews and tendons. If the Kidney and Liver are deficient, the bones and tendons may become weak and deficient as well. Deficiency fire dries yin and blood, causing malnourishment of the sinews. Prolonged lack of nourishment of the sinews leads to stiffness and spasms of the sinews, which can eventually progress to atrophy. Weak bones and tendons may lead to soreness of the lower back and knees, as well as weak legs and weakening of the leg muscles. A red tongue body with little coating indicates deficiency fire, and a fine, weak pulse suggests that the bones and tendons are becoming deficient.

Huang Bo (Cortex Phellodendri Chinensis) and *Zhi Mu* (Rhizoma Anemarrhenae) clear deficiency fire and strengthen yin of the lower *jiao*. *Gui Ban* (Plastrum Testudinis) nourishes Kidney yin, and replenishes *jing* (essence) and marrow. *Shu Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae Praeparata) and *Bai Shao* (Radix Paeoniae Alba) nourish yin and tonify the blood. *Hu Gu* (Os Tigris) strengthens the sinews and bones. *Suo Yang* (Herba Cynomorii) nourishes Kidney yang and *jing*. *Chen Pi* (Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae) and *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) strengthen the Spleen and harmonize the middle *jiao* to prevent the cold and stagnating herbs from damaging the digestive system.

Modifications

- If there is more deficiency heat, use *Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae) instead of *Shu Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae Praeparata).
- With atrophy and weakness of the muscles due to blood deficiency, add *Chuan Xiong* (Rhizoma Chuanxiong) and *Du Zhong* (Cortex Eucommiae).
- With atrophy and weakness of the muscles due to qi deficiency, add *Ren Shen* (Radix et Rhizoma Ginseng) and *Huang Qi* (Radix Astragali).
- With atrophy and weakness of the muscles due to *jing* (essence) deficiency, add *Lu Jiao Shuang* (Cornu Cervi Degelatinatum) and *Rou Cong Rong* (Herba Cistanches).
- For seminal emissions, add *Long Gu* (Os Draconis) and *Mu Li* (Concha Ostreae).

Cautions/Contraindications

Hu Qian Wan is contraindicated in patients with atrophy caused by damp-heat invasion.

Clinical Studies and Research

1. **Muscle atrophy and lateral spinal sclerosis:** It has been reported that *Hu Qian Wan* plus *Ren Shen* (Radix et Rhizoma Ginseng) and *Huang Qi* (Radix Astragali) is effective in treating muscle atrophy and lateral spinal sclerosis, especially if the conditions are characterized by yin and yang deficiencies.¹

2. **Hypocalcemia:** Use of modified *Hu Qian Wan* was associated with good therapeutic effect in treating 15 patients with low plasma calcium levels following thyroidectomy. The formula contained *Huang Bo* (Cortex Phellodendri Chinensis) 12g, *Zhi Mu* (Rhizoma Anemarrhenae) 6g, *Suo Yang* (Herba Cynomorii) 6g, *Shu Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae Praeparata) 9g, *Bai Shao* (Radix Paeoniae Alba) 9g, *Gui Ban* (Plastrum Testudinis) 10g, *Chen Pi* (Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae) 10g, *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) 15g, *Long Gu* (Os Draconis) 18g, *Mu Li* (Concha Ostreae) 30g, *E Jiao* (Colla Corii Asini) 30g, and lamb 15g. Additional modifications were made if necessary. Of 15 cases, the study reported complete recovery in 8 cases, improvement in 4 cases, and no change in 3 cases.²

Authors' Comments:

Hu Qian Wan, a formula designed to treat Liver and Kidney yin deficiencies with weakness of the bones and tendons, uses *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) for three important reasons:

- *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) counters the bitter and cold effects of *Huang Bo* (Cortex Phellodendri Chinensis).
- *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) assists *Chen Pi* (Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae) in warming the middle *jiao*, strengthening the

Spleen, regulating qi, and harmonizing the Stomach. Together, these two herbs prevent the yin tonics from creating stagnation in the middle *jiao*.

· *Gan Jiang* (Rhizoma Zingiberis) facilitates the generation of blood. According to Master Zhu Dan-Xi, it enters the Lung to benefit Lung qi, and enters the Liver channel to assist blood tonics in generating blood.³

Hu Qian Wan and *Da Bu Yin Wan* (Great Tonify the Yin Pill) both tonify Kidney yin, sedate fire, and contain *Shu Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae Praeparata), *Gui Ban* (Plastrum Testudinis), *Huang Bo* (Cortex Phellodendri Chinensis), and *Zhi Mu* (Rhizoma Anemarrhenae). Their differences are:

· *Hu Qian Wan* nourishes yin, sedates fire, and strengthens tendons and bones to treat yin-deficient heat in the Liver and Kidney, with *jing* (essence) and blood deficiencies causing atrophy or degeneration of the bones, tendons, and connective tissues.

· *Da Bu Yin Wan* treats Liver and Kidney yin deficiencies with deficiency fire symptoms of steaming bones sensation, tidal fever, cough with blood, a red tongue body with a scanty tongue coating, and a rapid, forceful pulse.⁴

About the Author:

Dr. John Chen is a recognized authority in both western pharmacology and Chinese Herbal Medicine. He teaches at the USC School of Pharmacy, Emperor's College, Yo San University of TCM, OCOM, Five Branches, AOMA and ACTCM. Dr. Chen's most recent published work is *Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology* (2003, AOM Press) and *Chinese Herbal Formulas and Applications* (2008, AOM Press) for which he was lead author.

To learn more about the above formula and how to use and combine 30 primary herbal formulas for the best clinical results, Dr. Alex Chen is speaking on the following topic for Lotus Institute. All classes are approved for 8 CEUs/PDAs by the CA, IL, FL Acupuncture Boards and NCCAOM.

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Reference:

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PO Box 92493
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www.eLotus.org info@elotus.org