Applications of Blood Invigorating Herbs
by John Chen, Ph.D, Pharm.D, L.Ac., O.M.D.

Blood stagnation often involves a wide range of potential causes and complications. Many of these causes and complications are opposites, such as deficiency and excess, cold and hot, and interior and exterior.

Potential causes of blood stagnation include defensive qi deficiency with exterior invasion of wind cold or wind damp, painful obstruction syndrome, febrile disorders, excess heat consuming the *ying* and *xue*, stagnation of phlegm and damp, and traumatic injuries leading to obstructed qi and blood circulation. Blood stagnation may lead to many potential complications, including amenorrhea, post partum abdominal pain, cardiovascular disorders, hypochondriac pain, paralysis, ulcers, and swellings.

Due to the complex array of causes and complications of blood stagnation, it is imperative that the treatment plan incorporate herbs to address the overall condition of the patient, in addition to using herbs that eliminate blood stagnation.

**Properties of Blood Invigorating**
Herbs that invigorate the blood and remove stasis are mostly acrid, bitter, and warm. The acrid taste promotes movement of blood and disperses stagnation. The bitter taste descends and drains stagnation. The warm property helps to invigorate and facilitate the movement of blood. These combined properties allow blood invigorating herbs to open the blood vessels, activate the blood circulation, disperse blood stagnation, and break blood stasis.

**Pharmacological Effects**
Many blood invigorating herbs may exert profound influence on the cardiovascular system. They dilate blood vessels, increase blood perfusion to smaller blood vessels, inhibit platelet aggregation, delay coagulation, and treat angina and ischemia.

Herbs that dilate coronary arteries include
- *Hong Hua* (Flos Carthami)
- *Dan Shen* (Radix Salviae Miltoirrhizae)
- *Chuan Xiong* (Rhizoma Ligustici Chuanxiong)
- *San Qi* (Radix Notoginseng)
- *Yan Hu Suo* (Rhizoma Corydalis)
- *Chi Shao* (Radix Paeoniae Rubrae)
- *Ji Xue Teng* (Caulis Spatholobi)
Herbs that dilate veins include
   *Chi Shao* (Radix Paeoniae Rubrae)
   *Tao Ren* (Semen Persicae)
   *Dan Shen* (Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae)

Many blood invigorating herbs may also have anticoagulant and antiplatelet effects. Blood clots form in the veins mainly due to coagulation, while blood clots form in the arteries mainly due to aggregation of platelets. Therefore, anticoagulant substances are prescribed to stop formation of clots in veins, and antiplatelet medicines are prescribed to stop formation of clots in arteries. Many herbs have excellent inhibitory influence on thrombus formation, and are used in the treatment of angina, stroke, and embolisms.

Herbs with anticoagulant and antiplatelet effects include
   *Dan Shen* (Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae)
   *Chuan Xiong* (Rhizoma Ligustici Chuanxiong)
   *Hong Hua* (Flos Carthami)
   *Chi Shao* (Radix Paeoniae Rubrae)

Some blood invigorating herbs lower plasma cholesterol levels to various degrees, such as *Yu Jin* (Radix Curcumae), *Hong Hua* (Flos Carthami), *Jiang Huang* (Rhizoma curcumae Longae), *Dan Shen* (Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae), and *Pu Huang* (Pollen Typhae). Others have immunologic, antineoplastic, antibiotic, and analgesic/anti-inflammatory effects.

**Cautions and Contraindications**

Blood invigorating herbs should be used with extreme caution for women with hypermenorrhea, and are contraindicated during pregnancy. This is a class of herbs that should be cautioned for patients taking certain types of medications, such as antihypertensives, antiplatelets/anticoagulants, or analgesics, because many of these herbs also have vasodilatory, antiplatelet/anticoagulant, and analgesic properties, and concurrent use of herb and drug could lead to hypotension, prolonged bleeding or bruising, and drowsiness.

This article is taken out of *Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology* by John Chen.

**About the Author**

Dr. John Chen is a recognized authority in both western pharmacology and Chinese Herbal Medicine, having combined formal training in both fields with extensive research ‘on the ground’ in China. He teaches at the USC School of Pharmacy, Emperor’s College, Yo San University of TCM, OCOM, Five Branches, AOMA and ACTCM, and has taught numerous professional seminars across the U.S. and internationally. Dr. Chen’s published works include *Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology* (2003, AOM Press) and *Chinese Herbal Formulas and Applications* (2008, AOM Press) for which works he is the lead author.

To learn about herb-drug interactions and herbal alternatives, Dr. John Chen is speaking on the following topics for Lotus Institute. All classes are 8 units.
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