6. DIGESTIVE DISORDERS

6D. DAMP-TURBIDITY
(Abdominal Cramping and Diarrhea)

Classical Formulas:

- Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San  
  huò xiāng zhèng qì sān (藿香正气散)
- Tong Xie Yao Fang  
  tòng xiè yào fāng (痛泻药方)
- Wu Mei Wan  
  wū méi wán (乌梅丸)

Modern Formulas:

- Huang Lian Su Pian  
  huáng lián sù piàn (黄连素片)

The formulas in this category address acute gastrointestinal disorders such as food poisoning, stomach flu and acute diarrhea. In traditional Chinese medicine, this is often a problem of damp-turbidity caused by exogenous pathogenic toxins. Otherwise, damp-turbidity can be due to a spleen-stomach disharmony aggravated by exogenous pathogenic factors, including wind-cold. It is often seen during the summer, when food has a tendency to go bad, or when one’s body is overheated and consumes too much raw food or cool liquids. In this regard, the syndrome is also referred to as summer damp-heat or summer heat.

Symptoms include sudden onset headache with nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Occasionally, symptoms of the common cold may be evident: sore throat, fever or aches. The formulas described here are effective, and relief may happen in one or two doses. Typically, dosing is continued every three hours until symptoms are gone. For chronic turbid-damp or diarrhea, they may have to be taken for a continued period of time. There are safe to do so, if necessary.

Several of the formulas are used for protozoan or bacterial infections of the gut, causing abdominal bloating erratic stools, and lowered immune response.

In general Chinese medical practitioners advise patients to discontinue spicy and greasy food during episodes of damp-turbidity.

For chronic and less severe episodes, refer to formulas in Chapter 6C. Food Stagnation and Indigestion.
Classical Formulas:

**HUO XIANG ZHENG QI SAN**

**Formula:** huò xiāng zhèng qì săn (藿香正气散), “Agastache Rectify Qi Powder”

**Author:** Imperial Medical Bureau (tài yī jú, 太医局); revised by Chén Shī-Wén (陈师文)

**Source:** Tài Píng Huì Mín Hé Jì Jú Fāng (太平惠民和剂局方), 1078

Literal: “(Era of) Great Peace, Benefit People Harmonious Medicines, Office (of) Formulas”

**Availability:**
- Agastache Formula (EG)
- Huo Xiang Zheng Qi Pian (PIM, PM)
- Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San (BP)
- Huo Xiang Zheng Qi Wan (HT, MS, TL)
  - * Early Comfort (K)
  - * Jiawei Huo Xiang Zheng Qi Formula (HS)

**Ingredients:** (from the standardized “Agastache Formula”)

- **huò xiāng** (藿香), Herba Agastachis 10.0 % FB
- **dà fù pí** (大腹皮), Pericarpium Arecae 10.0 G
- **zǐ sū yè** (紫苏叶), Folium Perillae 10.0 BA
- **fú líng** (茯苓), Poria 10.0 FC
- **bái zhǐ** (白芷), Radix Angelicae Dahuricae 10.0 BA
- **shēng jiāng** (生姜), Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens 10.0 BA
- **jié gĕng** (桔梗), Radix Platycodonis 6.7 CA
- **bái zhú** (白术), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae 6.7 AA
- **bàn xià** (半夏), Rhizoma Pinelliae 6.7 CA
- **chén pí** (陈皮), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae 6.7 G
- **hòu pò** (厚朴), Cortex Magnoliae Officinalis 6.7 FB
- **zhì gān cǎo** (炙甘草), Radix Glycyrrhiza Praep. 3.3 AA
- **dà zăo** (大枣), Fructus Jujubae 3.3 AA

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Dispels pathogenic factors, resolves the exterior, clears summer heat and dispels damp, dispels turbidity, descends stomach qi, harmonizes the middle jiao, relieves diarrhea. Use for early stage of summer damp-heat invasion or wind-cold invasion where there is dampness or damp-turbidity in the interior. Symptoms include fever with chills, frontal headache, loose stools or diarrhea, epigastric or abdominal bloating, abdominal pain, and vomiting or nausea. Applicable in acute gastroenteritis, food poisoning, and infections associated with stomach flu. Also useful for food stagnation, motion sickness, overeating and alcohol hangover.

**Pulse:** Soggy, slippery or floating  
**Tongue:** White or yellow greasy coat

**Comments:** *Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San* was originally formulated for exogenous wind-cold with a concurrent stagnation of the middle jiao, causing headache, vomiting and diarrhea. Despite the preponderance of warming herbs, the formula was also used for acute pathogenic summer damp-heat and cholera. Modern application has it as the medicine of choice for food poisoning and stomach flu, often requiring only one or two doses. It can also be used for food stagnation due to over-eating.

*Huò xiāng*, the principal herb, resolves turbid damp and harmonizes stomach and spleen. It is very good for nausea and vomiting. The synergistic coupling of *huò xiāng*, *dà fù pí* and *zǐ sū yè* works against communicable aerobic bacteria as well as viruses triggering gastrointestinal illness. In itself, *huò xiāng* address turbid-dampness with resultant nausea and vomiting. Five groups of herbs achieve the total affect: the AA herbs strengthen spleen; the BA herbs dispel wind-cold; the CA herbs address phlegm causing nausea; the FB and FC herbs dispel and descend dampness; and finally, the G herbs descend stomach qi.

In acute cases of food poisoning, it is often helpful to combine *Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San* with *Huang Lian Su*, described below.

**Further Reading:**

- Bensky et al, p. 691  
- Chen & Chen, p. 1079  
- Ellis, p. 151
TONG XIE YAO FANG

**Formula:** tòng xiè yào fāng (痛泻药方), “Painful Diarrhea Important Formula”

**Author:** Zhāng Jiè-Bīn (张介宾) aka Zhāng Jǐng-Yuè (张景岳)

**Source:** Jĭng Yuè Quán Shū (景岳全书), 1624
Literal: “Jing-Yue’s Complete Writings”

*also attributed to:*

**Author:** Zhū Zhèn-Hĕng (朱震亨) aka Zhū Dān-Xī (朱丹溪)

**Source:** Dān Xī Xīn Fă (丹溪心法), 1481
Literal: “Dan-Xi’s Heart Method” (eg, “Personal Insights”)

*also attributed to:*

**Author:** Wú Kūn (吴昆)

**Source:** Yī Fāng Kăo (医方考), 1584
Literal: “Medical Formula Investigations”

**Availability:**
- Calm Wind Teapills (PF)
- Tong Xie Yao Fang Wan (HT)

**Ingredients:** (from *Plum Flower* “Calm Wind Teapills”)

- chǎo bái sháo (炒白芍), Radix Paeoniae Alba 40.0 % AB
- chǎo bái zhú (炒白术), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macro. 29.9 % AA
- chǎo chén pí (炒陈皮), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae 20.0 % G
- fáng fēng (防风), Radix Saposhnikov./Ledebouriellae 10.1 % BA

**Ingredients:** (from *Herbal Times* “Tong Xie Yao Fang Wan”)

- bái sháo (白芍), Radix Paeoniae Alba 40 % AB
- bái zhú (白术), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macro. 30 % AA
- chén pí (陈皮), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae 20 % G
- fáng fēng (防风), Radix Saposhnikov./Ledebouriellae 10 % BA
Soothes the liver, tonifies spleen, descends stomach qi, relieves diarrhea, stops pain. Use for liver-spleen imbalance causing abdominal distension with pain, indigestion, borborygmus (abdominal gurgling), diarrhea with pain, or straining during defecation. Useful in acute or chronic gastroenteritis, dysentery, irritable bowel syndrome and colitis. Useful for loose stools caused by stress or anxiety.

**Pulse:** Wiry, slippery, or thin  
**Tongue:** Normal, or may be coated

**Comments:** This small formula treats abdominal pain or painful diarrhea whose underlying pattern is a combined spleen deficiency, liver stasis, and failure of stomach qi to descend. Early symptoms include abdominal distension with gradual development into abdominal pain, and later, small, unformed stools or diarrhea with pain and straining.

*Bái sháo* relaxes liver constraint, *bái zhú* supports spleen qi, and *chén pí* descends stomach qi. While *fáng fēng* is known for its effects in dispelling wind-cold, a secondary function is the control of diarrhea. Herbs that dispel wind go to the “exterior”, which includes the epithelium of the digestive tract. Also, combined with *bái sháo*, it helps relieve cramping.

The Plum Flower version follows the classical prescription, using dry stir-frying (*chǎo*, 炒) for three of the ingredients. This enhances an astringent effect, further inhibiting diarrhea.

**Further Reading:**  
Bensky et al, p. 125  
Chen & Chen, p. 257
WU MEI WAN

**Formula:** wū méi wán (乌梅丸), “Mume Pills”  
**Author:** Zhāng Zhòng-Jǐng (张仲景)  
**Source:** Shāng Hán Lùn (伤寒论), 220  
Literal: “Injury (by) Cold, Discussion”  

**Availability:**  
Wu Mei Wan (BP, HT)

**Ingredients:** (from Blue Poppy “Wu Mei Wan”)

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<td>guì zhī (桂枝), Ramulus Cinnamomi</td>
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<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>DB</td>
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<tr>
<td>rĕn shēn (人参), Radix Ginseng</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dāng guī (当归), Radix Angelicae Sinensis</td>
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<td>AB</td>
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<td>huáng lián (黄连), Rhizoma Coptidis</td>
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<td>huā jiāo (花椒), Pericarpium Zanthoxyli</td>
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**Ingredients:** (from Herbal Times “Wu Mei Wan”)

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<td>guì zhī (桂枝), Ramulus Cinnamomi</td>
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<td>DB</td>
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<tr>
<td>shĭ jūn zĭ (使君子), Fructus Quisqualis</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Q</td>
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Essential Chinese Formulas
Warms the intestines, clears heat, resolves toxins, quiets roundworms. Use for roundworm infestation of the intestines with intermittent attacks of abdominal cramping, vomiting following eating, or vomiting of worms. Also for chronic gastrointestinal disturbances marked by diarrhea or loose stools due to cold middle jiao with heat in the small or large intestines. Use for roundworms, biliary worms, and chronic amebic or bacterial dysentery. Helpful for protozoan infections including Giardia and Blastocystis hominis.

**Pulse:** Deep, forceful, or weak  
**Tongue:** Normal, or greasy coat

**Comments:** This formula has endured as a prescription for treating roundworms, with accompanying symptoms of abdominal pain and vomiting. It contains both warming and cooling herbs, which address the common presentation cold in the the middle jiao and heat in the lower jiao, found in chronic parasitic presentations. Traditionally, the herb wū méi kills worms, stops diarrhea, and is used in dysentery.

In the modern clinic, *Wu Mei Wan* can be used for chronic amebic or bacterial dysentery marked by diarrhea and borborygmus (abdominal gurgling), and also protozoan infections such as Giardia, Blastocystis hominis, and amebiasis. My clinical experience indicates usefulness of this formula for small intestine inflammation due to food allergies or micro-colitis with diarrhea, as found in leaky gut syndrome.

The two representative formulas use the same ingredients, except that the Herbal Times version adds Quisqualis shī jūn zǐ to further address parasites.

**Caution:** Zhì fù zǐ is used with caution during pregnancy.

**Further Reading:**
- Bensky et al, p. 847
- Chen & Chen, p. 1292
- Ellis, p. 327
Modern Formulas:

HUANG LIAN SU PIAN

Formula:  huáng lián sù pían (黄连素片), “Coptis Extract Tablet”
Source:  Modern patent medicine
        Manufacturer: Hubei Yichang Minkang Factory, Yichang, China

Availability:
        Huang Lian Su Tablets (PM)
        * Coptis Teapills (PF)

Ingredients: (from Hubei Yichang Minkang Factory “Huang Lian Su Pian”)
        huáng lián sù (黄连素), Rhizoma Coptidis extract 100 % DB
Clears heat, resolves toxin, relieves dysentery. Use for intestinal bacteria causing bacterial dysentery, food poisoning, gastroenteritis, abdominal pain and distension. Can be used in acute and chronic appendicitis, tooth abscess, canker sores, strep throat, and sinus infection. Can be applied topically for infections.

**Pulse:** Deep, forceful, or weak  
**Tongue:** Normal, or greasy coat

**Comments:** Huang Lian Su Tablets uses a very concentrated extraction of Coptis Huang Lian, producing berberine hydrochloride. It comes in a red and yellow box with twelve vials, each with twelve small tablets. The therapeutic dosage is 3 tablets, taken one to three times daily.

It is commonly used in China and Southeast Asia for acute diarrhea, bacterial dysentery, and food poisoning. It can be used to successfully treat a variety of intestinal pathogens, including pathogenic bacteria (Proteus, Citrobacter, Klebsiella, Salmonella), the fungus Candida albicans, and protozoa such as Giardia, Blastocystis hominis and Toxoplasmosis. Also, the pills can be crushed into powder and mixed with water or salve to treat infected wounds topically.

As a manufactured extraction (sù, 素), it is significantly stronger and more concentrated than powdered huáng lián. Plum Blossom offers a product by the same name, which is not concentrated, but has similar applications.

**Caution:** Huáng lián is a cold herb. Prolonged use or excessive dosage may cause diarrhea, abdominal or epigastric pain, or gastric upset. Monitor and adjust dose if necessary.
OTHER PRODUCTS APPROPRIATE FOR THIS CATEGORY:

Classical Formulas:

Bai Tou Weng Tang
   Anemone Combination (EG)

Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang
   Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang (TZ)
   Ban Xia Xie Xin Pian/Wan (GC)
   Drain The Middle (K)
   Pinellia Combination (EG)
   Pinellia Formula to Drain the Epigastrium (HS)
   * Counterflow Pearls (CP)
   * One Mind (K)

Da Chai Hu Tang
   See Chapter 7C

Gan Cao Xie Xin Tang
   Pinellia & Licorice Combination (EG)

Ge Gen Huang Qin Huang Lian Tang
   Pueraria, Coptis & Scute Combination (EG)

Liu He Tang
   Cardamon Combination (EG)

Mu Xiang Bing Lang Wan
   See Chapter 6E

Qing Shu Yi Qi Tang
   Astragalus & Atractylodes Combination (EG)
   Qing Shu Formula (K)

Shao Yao Tang
   Peony Combination (EG)

Sheng Jiang Xie Xin Tang
   Pinellia & Ginger Combination (EG)

Wei Ling Tang
   Magnolia & Poria/Hoelen Combination (EG)
Modern Formulas:

- Cinnamon Pearls (CP)
- Disperse Moisture (CMS)
- GI Care II (EV)
- Irritease (K)
- Three Kernel Decoction (AL)