

The following chapter is excerpted from Jake Fratkin's *Essential Chinese Formulas* (2014). It describes treatment of acute food poisoning causing vomiting and diarrhea, and references all available GMP Chinese patent medicines and American-made Chinese herbal products.

## 6. DIGESTIVE DISORDERS

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

#### **Classical Formulas:**

Huo Xiang Zheng Qi San

*huò xiāng zhèng qì sǎn* (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 sǎn* (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”)

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

**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:** *Jǐng Yuè Quán Shū* (景岳全书), 1624

Literal: “Jing-Yue’s Complete Writings”

*also attributed to:*

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

**Source:** *Dān Xī Xīn Fǎ* (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 Kǎo* (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”)

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

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

<i>bái sháo</i> (白芍), Radix Paeoniae Alba	40 %	AB
<i>bái zhú</i> (白术), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macro.	30	AA
<i>chén pí</i> (陈皮), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae	20	G
<i>fáng fēng</i> (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*”)

<i>wū méi</i> (乌梅), Fructus Mume	20. %	L
<i>gān jiāng</i> (干姜), Rhizoma Zingiberis	12	E
<i>guì zhī</i> (桂枝), Ramulus Cinnamomi	12	BA
<i>zhì fù zǐ</i> (炙附子), Radix Aconiti Lateralis Praeparata	12	E
<i>huáng bǎi</i> (黄柏), Cortex Phellodendri	12	DB
<i>rén shēn</i> (人参), Radix Ginseng	12	AA
<i>dāng guī</i> (当归), Radix Angelicae Sinensis	12	AB
<i>huáng lián</i> (黄连), Rhizoma Coptidis	6	DB
<i>huā jiāo</i> (花椒), Pericarpium Zanthoxyli	2	E

**Ingredients:** (from Herbal Times “*Wu Mei Wan*”)

<i>wū méi</i> (乌梅), Fructus Mume	18.5 %	L
<i>dāng guī</i> (当归), Radix Angelicae Sinensis	11.1	AB
<i>zhì fù zǐ</i> (炙附子), Radix Aconiti Lateralis Praeparata	11.1	E
<i>gān jiāng</i> (干姜), Rhizoma Zingiberis	11.1	E
<i>guì zhī</i> (桂枝), Ramulus Cinnamomi	11.1	BA
<i>huáng bǎi</i> (黄柏), Cortex Phellodendri	11.1	DB
<i>rén shēn</i> (人参), Radix Ginseng	11.1	AA
<i>huáng lián</i> (黄连), Rhizoma Coptidis	7.4	DB
<i>huā jiāo</i> (花椒), Pericarpium Zanthoxyli	3.7	E
<i>shǐ jūn zǐ</i> (使君子), Fructus Quisqualis	3.7	Q

**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 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 shǐ 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 piàn* (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*”)

<i>huáng lián sù</i> (黄连素), Rhizoma Coptidis extract	100 %	DB
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**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*

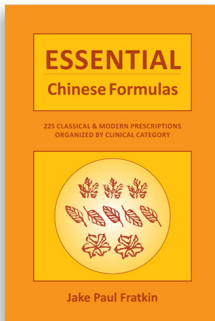
Pinellia & Ginger Combination (EG)

*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)



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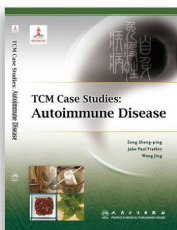


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