Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan) is a Ming Dynasty formula first published in Shou Shi Bao Yuan (Achieving Longevity by Guarding the Source). It is a modification of the famous 12th century formula, Rehmannia Six Formula (Liu Wei Di Huang Wan).

**General Signs/Symptoms**

Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan) was designed to address chronic disorders and aging marked by significant yin deficiency in the lungs and kidneys. Signs and symptoms that distinguish the pattern include chronic dry, weak cough with possible blood-tinged expectoration, weak cough with scant sticky phlegm, shortness of breath, asthma or wheezing, chronic laryngitis from dryness, frequent urination, impotence or premature ejaculation, chronic nephritis, shortness of breath, asthma, or wheezing, diabetes. The primary pattern signs and symptoms will be accompanied by typical yin deficiency pattern signs and symptoms such as weakness in the lower body, tidal fever, dry mouth, dry skin, dizziness, night sweats, hot palms and soles, or tinnitus.

**Classical Applications**

1. Supplements kidney qi and yin
2. Supplements lung and stomach yin
3. Astringes lung qi and kidney essence
4. Generates fluids, moistens dryness
5. Clears heat

**Ingredients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PINYIN</th>
<th>LATIN</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>PERCENT OF FORMULA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheng Di Huang (chief)</td>
<td>Rehmanniae (radix)</td>
<td>Rehmanna root, unprocessed</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mai Men Dong (co-chief)</td>
<td>Ophiopogonis (radix)</td>
<td>Ophiopogon tuber</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Gua Shi Hu (deputy)</td>
<td>Dendrobii (herba)</td>
<td>Chinese Orchid, Dendrobium</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan Yao (deputy)</td>
<td>Dioscoreae (rhizoma)</td>
<td>Chinese Yam</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan Zhu Yu (deputy)</td>
<td>Corni (fructus)</td>
<td>Asiatic Dogwood fruit, Cornelian Cherry</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Zhu (deputy)</td>
<td>Polygonati odorati (rhizoma)</td>
<td>Aromatic Solomon's Seal</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bei Sha Shen (deputy)</td>
<td>Glehniae (radix)</td>
<td>Glehnia root</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Wei Zi (deputy)</td>
<td>Schisandraceae (fructus)</td>
<td>Schisandra fruit</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ze Xie (assistant)</td>
<td>Alismatis (rhizoma)</td>
<td>Asian Water Plantain rhizome</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu Dan Pi (assistant)</td>
<td>Moutan (cortex)</td>
<td>Tree Peony root bark</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fu ling (assistant)</td>
<td>Poria</td>
<td>Poria, Hoelen, Tuckahoe</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Indications / Modern Applications**

- Appetite, lack of
- Asthma
- Atopic dermatitis
- Complexion, lusterless
- Constipation, from dryness
- Cough, dry, weak, with scant, sticky phlegm
- Coughing up blood
- Diabetes mellitus
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth and throat
- Dry skin
- Dyspnea/ shortness of breath
- Ejaculation, premature
- Fatigue and generalized weakness in elderly
- Fever, tidal
- Hoarseness, dry-type
- Impotence
- Incontinence, urinary
- Laryngitis, from dryness
- Nausea
- Nephritis, chronic
- Night sweats
- Palms and soles of feet hot
- Palpitation
- Peri-menopausal syndrome
- Pulmonary tuberculosis
- Ringing in the ears
- Seminal loss
- Steaming bones
- Tinnitus
- Tuberculosis, pulmonary
- Urination, frequent
- Vertigo
- Vision, blurred
- Wheezing
**Eight Immortals Formula**

**Formula Actions**
- Supplements kidney qi and yin
- Supplements lung and stomach yin
- Astringes lung qi and kidney essence
- Generates fluids, moistens dryness
- Clears heat

**Tongue**

Body will be red, shiny, and maybe small. Coat will be scant or absent, possibly geographic.

**Pulse**

Fine and rapid, or large and empty in the *cun* (inch) and/or *chi* (cubit) positions.

**Contraindications / Cautions**

Do not use in cases of internal or external cold or during an acute viral infection. In cases with yin deficiency fire without signs of lung yin deficiency use Rehmannia & Scrophularia Formula (*Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan*) instead.

**Dosage**

Standard dosage is two tablets, taken three times daily.

**Synergy of Ingredients**

Eight Immortals Formula (*Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan*) is a formula built upon the most famous of yin tonics, Rehmannia Six Formula (*Liu Wei Di Huang Wan*). The original modification added two substances (which accounts for the number eight included in the name of the formula): ophiopogon root (*mai men dong*) and schisandra fruit (*wu wei zi*). The present formulation adds to GongTing-Xian’s “eight” three additional substances: aromatic Solomon’s seal (*yu zhu*), dendrobium (*shi hu*), and glehnia root (*bei sha shen*). It also substitutes fresh rehmannia (*sheng di huang*) for the prepared rehmannia (*shu di huang*). This substitution of the chief ingredient is a common one. Whereas prepared rehmannia (*shu di huang*) supplements both yin and blood, it is slightly warming. While fresh rehmannia (*sheng di huang*), in contrast, is “very cold,” its supplementation is primarily of yin and body fluid; and though it does not really supplement blood, fresh rehmannia (*sheng di huang*) can enter the blood level to drain heat. These differences of action make fresh rehmannia more appropriate than its prepared form when treating damage to the lungs or kidneys from chronic yin fire.

The five additions to *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* concentrate the formula’s actions on nourishing lung and stomach yin, and preventing further leakage (of qi and essence) from the lungs and kidneys. Since this formula treats a dual yin deficiency of the kidney and lung, fresh rehmannia (*sheng di huang*) cannot rule by itself, because it does not enter the lung channel. A co-chief is required, and Gong fulfills this role by adding ophiopogon (*mai men dong*). Ophiopogon (*mai men dong*) primarily moistens lung and stomach yin and generates body fluids, but it also has moistening actions for the heart and the intestines and, being cold-natured, can cool the upper warmer, calm irritability, and clear heat.

One of the deputies, schisandra fruit (*wu wei zi*), is also from Gong’s original formulation. It is notable for possessing five flavors (*wu wei*) and said to enter all five of the *zang* organs, plus the stomach *fu*. The variety of the flavors may lead one to believe that schisandra (*wu wei zi*) has an unusually broad scope of actions, but this is not really the case. Though able to enter all five *zang*, it has the strongest influence on the kidney, heart, and lung. The prevailing flavor is sour and its prevailing action is supplementing and restraining. Being also sweet and warm, it enters the yin organs to supplement and harmonize, but after penetrating the *zang* with sweetness and warmth, the prevailing sour flavor astringes and restrains. This is the nature of schisandra (*wu wei zi*). In the present formula, schisandra (*wu wei zi*) might be considered the sole chief, since it is the only substance that enters both lung and kidney to supplement the deficiencies of the pattern. But since its ability to restrain and astringe outweigh its ability to supplement, it takes the position of deputy in relation to both the chief and co-chief.

Two of the other three substances included in the version of the formula under discussion here, along with ophiopogon (*mai men dong*) are the main yin supplementing substances of Glehnia and Ophiopogon Decoction (*Sha Shen Mai Men Dong Tang*), a formula designed to expel, protect against, and repair damage from external dryness in the autumn. We have already discussed ophiopogon (*mai men dong*). In Eight Immortals Formula (*Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan*), the other two substances from Glehnia and Ophiopogon Decoction, glehnia root (*bei sha shen*) and polygonatum (*yu zhu*), enter the lung and stomach, nourish yin and generate fluids, by which actions they can be seen to serve as deputies to the co-chief, ophiopogon (*mai men dong*). Glehnia root (*bei sha shen*) has an action to dredge the lungs, and can therefore assist in venting lingering pathogens in the lung. Polygonatum (*yu zhu*) supplements yin and generate fluids, not only in the lung and stomach, but in the sinews. It has the ability to nourish the interstitial fluid of the sinews to facilitate the expulsion of heat and pathogens.

The final substance of Eight Immortals Formula (*Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan*) is dendrobium (*shi hu*). Dendrobium (*shi hu*) supplements the yin of the kidney and stomach, generates fluids, supports kidney essence, and drains deficiency heat. It is commonly combined with the chief herb, fresh rehmannia (*sheng di
is within the kidney where the qi from heaven is stored. During inhalation the lung receives the pure qi from heaven and the kidney pulls the heavenly qi down into itself for storage.

The mingmen is today often described as a kind of “pilot light” (located either between the two kidneys or within the right kidney structure, depending on which school of thought one subscribes to). This pilot light functions much like the one in our modern furnaces. It maintains a low degree of warmth itself at all times and provides the potential and the point of origin to distribute yang all over the body. When we inhale, the qi of heaven that the lung takes in descends to the mingmen. This qi acts like a fan across the fire within the gate of life and stirs the kidney yang that is the basis for the yang of the entire body. When we exhale, the qi-governing action of the lungs does two main things: 1) it activates the qi stored in the kidneys and distributes it throughout the body; and 2) the same exhalation, by initiating the movement of qi and by virtue of it being a yin organ located in the yang aspect of the body (and governing a yang substance: qi), drives the body’s yin materials to move, thereby clearing out turbid waste from every cell in the body. It is easy to see from the above described mechanisms that in the qi-yin dynamic of the kidney-lung relationship, the most important aspect is maintaining the yin. If the yin of these two organs is sufficient, the qi will flourish and good health will prevail.

The application of the present formulation differs from that of Gong Ting-Xian’s primarily in that it has been expanded to more powerfully supplement stomach yin in addition to the lung and kidney yin. Good stomach yin is essential for recovering from debilitation because it plays a major role in our ability to turn food into qi and to maintain suppleness of the organs and sinews. Addressing the stomach yin component is an important modification for treating the elderly and many disorders where the yin is chronically consumed in the organs of the body. Conditions that damage the lung yin often damage the stomach yin as well. Dry throat and lips, thirst, dry stools, scanty urine, red patch in the center of the tongue, and low food intake are signs that stomach yin requires supplementation.

Modern Applications

Atopic Dermatitis
A Kampo formula, Bakuniijogan, that is very similar to Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan), was found to be very effective for treating atopic dermatitis in mice. The two ingredients found to be the most effective in this formula are mai men dong and wu wei zi.1

Diabetes
Insulin resistance may be improved with the use of Liu Wei Di Huang Wan. The study showed that the most effective herbal ingredient to decrease plasma glucose levels was found to be dioscorea rhizome (shan yao).2 If a patient presents with more upper burner symptoms of xiao ke syndrome, such as; dry cough, dry mouth, dry throat, asthma, upper bronchial conditions with dryness, Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)—a modification of Liu Wei Di Huang Wan may be an appropriate formula.

Lower Respiratory Disease and Asthma
This category includes a wide variety of Western disease designations, such as LRTD (lower respiratory tract disorder),...
COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), chronic asthma, cough and bronchitis. When the primary symptoms indicate lung and kidney yin deficiency, with qi deficiency, **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)** is suggested for treatment of the disease pattern.

**Peri-Menopausal Syndrome**

“Autumn Flower Syndrome” is the English translation of a Chinese term referring to a set of symptoms sometimes experienced by middle-aged women, prior to the onset of menopause. The primary symptoms are: depression, tearfulness, irritability, headache, tiredness, insomnia, lack of concentration, and difficulty making decisions. When the TCM diagnosis is kidney yin deficiency, liver qi stagnation that occasionally results in liver fire, and qi deficiency, **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)** may be the most appropriate formula.

**FORMULA COMPARISONS**

Eight Immortals Formula and Lily Preserve Metal Formula

These two formulas have the ability to nourish lung and kidney yin and stop cough. There are some differences in the actions of each. **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)** also has the ability to nourish stomach yin deficiency and moisten dryness. The patient that would most benefit from this formula has symptoms of dryness and heat from yin deficiency such as: dry, raspy cough, coughing up blood from dryness, dry mouth, throat and skin, dry stool, bronchial or laryngeal condition from dryness. The tidal fever symptoms may be more pronounced and may include five palm heat. The patient’s tongue may be red, glossy, with no coat and may show signs of dryness and cracks.

The patient for whom the **Lily Preserve Metal Formula (Bai Hu Gu Jin Tang)** would be most appropriate has symptoms that are primarily lung related but also has unresolved phlegm causing sputum and wheezing cough. The sputum is probably thick and difficult to expectorate due to the yin deficiency dryness. Transformation of phlegm is addressed in the **Lily Preserve Metal Formula (Bai Hu Gu Jin Tang)** but not in **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)**.

Eight Immortals Formula and Sheng Mai Formula

These two formulas have a few actions in common: the ability to nourish lung qi, lung yin, stomach yin and moisten dryness. There are a number of significant differences. **Sheng Mai Formula (Sheng Mai San)** is intended for use with a much more deficient patient, one who has exhausted the bodily fluids, the yin and qi of the lungs, and is in a very weakened state. The pulse would be quite weak, thus the English translation of **Sheng Mai San** is “Generate the Pulse Powder”. The person for which this formula is most appropriate, is very likely too weak to even mount a productive cough in order to clear their lungs, so the cough is very dry and weak or there may be very dry, difficult to expectorate sputum. This pattern may also involve the heart organ, as in congestive heart failure. The patient’s wei qi may be excessively weak leading to profuse, spontaneous sweating. This further depletes the bodily fluids and saps the strength of the heart, leading to significant overall weakness and fatigue and weakened wei qi defenses.

Eight Immortals Formula and Jing Qi Formula

These formulas both support nourishment of kidney qi and yin, though the other actions of the formulas are quite different. As the name indicates, the primary focus of **Jing Qi Formula (Jing Qi Pian)** is to support kidney jing (essence) that has been depleted through excessive work, stress, or sexual activity. **Jing Qi Formula (Jing Qi Pian)** can also move liver qi stagnation, resulting from stress and overwork, and nourish liver yin. A patient may present with similar indications and a similar tongue and pulse presentation but if deficiency heat symptoms and dryness are present, then **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)** is more appropriate.

Eight Immortals Formula and Rehmannia & Scrophularia Formula

These two formulas both nourish kidney yin, but this is where their similarity ends. **Rehmannia and Scrophularia Formula (Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan)** would be the ideal formula if the patient presents with yin deficiency fire symptoms such as dizziness or vertigo due to fire, red face, low grade afternoon or tidal fever, hot flashes, restlessness, toothache from yin deficiency fire, dry and sore throat, and possibly urinary difficulty, UTI or cystitis due to inflammation. This formula does not address lung yin directly, as does **Eight Immortals Formula (Ba Xian Chang Shou Wan)**.

**ENDNOTES**