

TANG KUEI & TRIBULUS FORMULA DANG GUI YIN ZI

ORIGINS: *Ji Sheng Fang*, 1253.

Tang Kuei & Tribulus Formula (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) originates from *Formulas to Aid the Living* (*Ji Sheng Fang*), published in 1253. The virtues of its clinical application were popularized by Zhu Dan-xi in the following century. In recent years this formula has become a common patent and popular herbal formula in Japan, Taiwan, and the United States.

GENERAL SIGNS/SYMPTOMS

This formula is used for all signs and symptoms of wind in the blood with an underlying blood deficiency. These consist primarily of a wide variety of chronic skin conditions, but include itchy eyes.

CLASSICAL ACTIONS

1. Nourishes blood

2. Moistens blood dryness

3. Dispels wind

4. Relieves itching

INGREDIENTS

PINYIN	LATIN	ENGLISH	PERCENT OF FORMULA
<i>Bai Ji Li</i> (deputy)	<i>Tribuli fructus</i>	Tribulus, Puncturevine Fruit, Caltrop	15%
<i>Sheng Di Huang</i> (assistant)	<i>Rehmanniae radix</i>	Rehmannia, unprocessed	11%
<i>Bai Shao</i> (deputy)	<i>Paeoniae radix, alba</i>	Chinese White Peony root	11%
<i>Zhi He Shou Wu</i> (assistant)	<i>Polygoni Multiflori radix, preparata</i>	Fo-Ti	10%
<i>Jing Jie</i> (deputy)	<i>Schizonepetae herba</i>	Schizonepeta	10%
<i>Fang Feng</i> (deputy)	<i>Saposhnikoviae radix</i>	Siler root	10%
<i>Dang Gui</i> (assistant)	<i>Angelicae Sinensis radix</i>	Dong Quai, Tang Kuei root	8%
<i>Chi Shao</i> (assistant)	<i>Paeoniae radix, rubra</i>	Chinese Red Peony root	7%
<i>Huang Qi</i> (assistant)	<i>Astragali radix</i>	Astragalus root	5%
<i>Chuang Xiong</i> (deputy)	<i>Chuanxiong rhizoma</i>	Ligusticum Wallichii rhizome	5%
<i>Gan Cao</i> (assistant)	<i>Glycyrrhizae radix</i>	Chinese Licorice root	4%
<i>Fu Ping</i> (assistant)	<i>Spirodela herba</i>	Spirodela	4%

GENERAL INDICATIONS / MODERN APPLICATIONS

- Dermatitis
- Eczema
- Eyes, red and itchy
- Pruritus
- Psoriasis
- Rhinitis, allergic
- Skin dry and itchy
- Skin rash, red with itching
- Urticaria (hives)

FORMULA DISCUSSION

In Oriental medicine (OM), skin conditions commonly are seen to arise from heat (wind-heat, heat toxin, damp-heat, summer-heat), from wind-cold obstructing the flow of qi and blood, from the seven emotions, or from wind with deficiency. Heat, wind-cold, and the seven emotions generally manifest as acute conditions (though they may be recurring), while the last one is usually treated as chronic. It is the chronic skin pattern from wind with deficiency that is best treated with **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*).

A common attribute of skin conditions is itching. Itching is a symptom that can only be experienced in the skin (or sometimes in the “flesh”). Itching has a very close relationship with the concept of *feng* (wind) in OM because it can strike and resolve suddenly and can move around quickly. In fact, the word *feng*, used within the context of skin disorders in TCM, always suggests itching. The two most commonly used formulas to treat itching in the OM formulary are Tang Kuei and Arctium Formula (*Xiao Feng San*) for acute itching, and **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) for chronic conditions. In the early stages of treatment, the two formulas are often combined. Once the symptom of itching is managed, the Tang Kuei and Arctium Formula (*Xiao Feng San*) can be eliminated, but the **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) should be continued until the underlying deficiency is resolved.

FORMULA ACTIONS

- Nourishes blood
- Moistens blood dryness
- Disperses wind
- Relieves itching

TONGUE

Pale, with a dry coating, may have a red tip.

PULSE

Thin and tight, and/or weak.

CONTRAINDICATIONS / CAUTIONS
DO NOT USE DURING PREGNANCY.

DOSAGE

The standard dosage is 2-3 tablets, 3 times daily. Safe for long-term use. The course of treatment is typically 4-9 months.

Aristotle is attributed with observing that “horror vacui” (“nature abhors a vacuum”). This phenomenon seems to coincide with the OM concept of blood deficiency making the skin susceptible to wind. When a vessel is deficient, it cannot be full; when a vessel is not full of its proper substance, it is susceptible to filling with what is not proper to it. In the case of blood vessels, this means that the vacuum created by a blood deficiency leaves the vessel susceptible to filling with yang factors, i.e., wind.

Wind can be generated internally or invade exogenously. Internal wind in the blood vessels comes from degrading *ying qi*. When the vessel is filled with blood and the qi is sufficient to propel the blood, the circulation is harmonious, the tissues are nourished, the qi is supported, and the defenses are strong. But when the blood vessels become vacuous, the qi is not supported. It begins to degrade while still trying to push the blood. This is the origin of internally-generated wind in the blood. Exogenous wind affects the skin because the insufficient nourishment of the external tissues and peripheral blood vessels allows the wind to penetrate deeper, disturbing the blood. Generally speaking, within the context under discussion here, the internal/external etiology of the wind is inconsequential. The exogenous wind is a trigger to a skin disorder where there is an underlying blood deficiency. Exogenous wind simply hastens the emergence of skin symptoms, which, free from external wind, would have eventually produced its own wind from the degraded *ying qi*. **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) is formulated to fill the vessels with blood, dispel the wind, and relieve itching.

SYNERGY OF INGREDIENTS

Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) is built upon the single most famous tonic for supplementing the blood: Four Substance Decoction (*Si Wu Tang*). Three of the four original “substances” are retained in **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*), namely, white peony (*bai shao*), angelica root (*dang gui/ tang kuei*) and ligusticum (*chuan xiong*); but the prepared rehmannia (*shu di huang*) is replaced with the unprepared/fresh rehmannia (*sheng di huang*) to emphasize the blood-cooling action of the formula. Together these substances address the underlying blood deficiency. Assisting in nourishing the blood is polygonum (*zhi he shou wu*). In addition to their supplementing action, angelica root (*dang gui/ tang kuei*) and ligusticum (*chuan xiong*) and polygonum (*zhi he shou wu*) all have some ability to dispel wind.

Tribulus (*bai ji li*) and schizonepeta (*jing jie*) are both used at times as stand-alone herbs to vent rashes and stop itching. Along with siler (*fang feng*) and spirodela (*fu ping*), these four substances dispel wind in the blood and calm itching, but they accomplish the task each in their own way. Siler (*fang feng*), though renowned for its ability to dispel wind, is rather heavy and does not by itself rise to the skin. That is why it can be used to treat wind in the intestines and in the flesh. But schizonepeta (*jing jie*), by contrast, is light and naturally ascends. When the two are combined, they are a powerful combination to dispel wind in the blood and to vent wind pathogens through the skin. Tribulus (*bai ji li*) is also light weight. This allows it not only to reach the skin layer, but also to rise up into the eyes, which tend to become red and itchy. It clears and brightens the eyes while it unblocks qi clumping in the areas governed by the liver, including the blood. It is included in the formula name because it is said to “govern wind-itching all over the body.”

Spirodela (*fu ping*) is the only wind-dispelling substance in this formula that does not enter the liver. Rather, it enters the lung channel, which rules the skin, and is especially powerful to open the pores and release the exterior. It has an affinity with the bladder and with water in general (it grows on the surface of ponds) and can help pull out damp-heat pathogens that are accumulating in the skin by combining them with sweat and drawing out the damp-heat pathogens through the pores.

Astragalus (*huang qi*) plays an assistant role in this formula. It is well-known for its ability to firm up the exterior and strengthen the *wei qi*. One aspect of this exterior-firming action is to strengthen the skin itself. Astragalus (*huang qi*) has an out-thrusting direction that helps it to discharge pus. But because it nourishes primal *qi*, which lies deeper than the flesh and skin layers, the out-thrusting action is actually accomplished in part by virtue of astragalus' (*huang qi*) ability to draw up *qi* from the interior to support the exterior, displacing pathogenic *qi* with upright *qi*.

Another assistant, red peony root (*chi shao*), is not part of the original formula from the *Ji Sheng Fang*. It is added to the present formulation to drain heat from the blood, break up stasis that can accumulate wherever lesions form, and to assist in venting rashes. Finally, licorice root (*gan cao*) is part of the formula, not as an envoy, but as another assistant. Licorice root (*gan cao*) is used to nourish both *qi* and blood for a wide range of deficiency patterns, but it also is commonly applied both topically and internally to treat toxic sores and heat-type rashes.

MODERN APPLICATIONS

Urticaria (hives)—A study was conducted to investigate the clinical treatment with **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) in 26 cases of chronic urticaria. The shortest duration of urticaria was three months and the longest was 14 years. All cases reported itching and temporarily raised red skin, which would return to normal without scarring or marking. Modifications were added dependent on presentation. For wind-cold, cinnamon twig (*gui zhi*) and fresh ginger (*sheng jiang*), for wind-heat lonicera flower (*jin yin hua*) and anemarrhena rhizome (*zhi mu*), for stomach heat Chinese rhubarb (*da huang*) and capillaris (*yin chen hao*), for unbearable itching bitter orange (*zhi ke*), for dampness fermented leaven (*shen qu*) and coix (*yi yi ren*), for blood stasis apricot seed (*xing ren*), carthamus (*hong hua*), and Chinese salvia root (*dan shen*), and for hives due to seafood allergy gizzard lining (*ji nei jin*) and Chinese hawthorn fruit (*shan zha*). All cases discontinued Western antihistamine medications. The treatment results showed 12 cases “cured,” with clinical signs and symptoms gone with no recurrence for six months, 11

cases “improved,” with clinical symptoms improved and recurrence interval prolonged, and three cases had “little or no effect.” The total effectiveness rate was 88.46%.ⁱ

Pruritus (itchiness)—A clinical trial was conducted to observe **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) for the treatment of senile pruritus. 72 cases were in the treatment group and given **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*). 66 cases were in the control group and were given antihistamines. The formula was modified with cicada molting (*chan tui*) and silkworm (*jiang can*) for severe itching, oldenlandia (*bai hua she she cao*), tree peony (*mu dan pi*) for itching due to infection, Chinese salvia root (*dan shen*) and carthamus (*hong hua*) for dark red skin lesions, and for insomnia jujube (*suan zao ren*) and akebia (*mu tong*) were added. The treatment course was four weeks. The use of antihistamines was discontinued for the treatment group during the clinical trial. The treatment results showed 20 cases cured with full recovery and no recurrence six months post treatment. 34 cases were deemed markedly improved with 80% of the skin lesions subsiding, no itching, with intermittent itching episodes during the six months post treatment. Ten cases were deemed improved with 40% of the skin lesions subsiding and significantly reduced itching. Eight cases were deemed invalid with less than 40% improvement of the skin lesions and no improvement in symptoms. The total effective rate was 88.9% for the treatment group, compared to 63.6% for the control group.ⁱⁱ

Eczema (atopic dermatitis)—30 cases of chronic eczema were treated with a combined treatment therapy of Chinese herbs and plum blossom with good effect. Eczema lesions presented as rough, showed lichenification, brown-red or brown in color, recurrent, and were location specific. Subjects were broken into two groups dependent on presentation; 18 cases of damp-heat type eczema which used *Dang Gui Nian Tong Tang* herbal formula for treatment, and 12 cases of blood deficiency with wind-dryness type which used **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) herbal formula for treatment. Treatment course was four weeks. Total effective rate was 86.6%. This was in comparison to the control group using conventional pharmaceutical medications consisting of antihistamines and topical corticosteroids with a total effective rate of 56.6%.ⁱⁱⁱ

Psoriasis—A skin barrier function test was conducted on psoriasis patients and healthy patients. Testing included sebum content, skin moisture content, transdermal water loss (TEWL). Patients with psoriasis had overall decreased skin barrier function compared to patients with healthy skin. This included decreased sebum content, decreased skin moisture content, and raised

TEWL. Fifty patients with psoriasis were treated with **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*). The results indicate that **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) regulates skin barrier function, improving skin lesions, sebum content, skin moisture content, and reduces TEWL. The formula was shown to improve psoriatic skin lesions symptoms, including dryness and scaling, as well as reduce recurrence rate.^{iv}

FORMULA COMPARISONS

Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) and **Tang Kuei and Arctium Formula** (*Xiao Feng San*)

Both of these formulas address skin issues like eczema, hives, rashes, dermatitis, etc. In general, **Tang Kuei and Arctium Formula** (*Xiao Feng San*) is used for acute skin disorders, and **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) is used for chronic issues. The two are often combined in the early stages of treatment for chronic issues, in order to quickly get the symptoms under control. Once the acute phase of the chronic condition has faded, **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin*

Zi) should be continued on its own until the underlying blood deficiency is resolved. When addressing long standing conditions like eczema or psoriasis, both formulas are necessary depending on the stage and how the patient is presenting.

Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*) and **He Shou Wu Tablets** (*Shou Wu Pian*)

He Shou Wu Tablets (*Shou Wu Pian*) treat skin conditions like eczema or skin rashes due to blood deficiency, similar to that of **Tang Kuei and Tribulus Formula** (*Dang Gui Yin Zi*). **He Shou Wu Tablets** (*Shou Wu Pian*) supplement the blood deficiency, while also moistening dryness. This formula expels wind by supporting the blood, but does not address the wind directly and therefore is not as strong to address skin conditions and itching in particular. It is advantageous to add **He Shou Wu Tablets** (*Shou Wu Pian*) during times of remission in conditions like eczema to support the root or whenever there is significant dryness in the presentation.

USEFUL COMBINATIONS

For red skin rash with liver qi constraint	Use with Free and Easy Wanderer Plus .
For liver qi stagnation without heat signs	Use with Bupleurum and Tang Kuei Formula .
For acute conditions	Use with Xiao Feng San .
For intense itching with dryness	Use with Heavenly Emperor's Formula .
For eczema that is dark red or purple in color	Use with Blood Palace Formula or Chong Release Formula .

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Xu Qin Shun, et al., "Dang Gui Yin Zi Modified Treatment of 26 Cases of Chronic Urticaria," *Chinese Journal of Medical Research*, 2006, No 9.

ⁱⁱ Xie Zhao, et al., "Senile Pruritus Treatment Efficacy of Dang Gui Yin Zi," *JiLin Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2007, Vol 27, No 11.

ⁱⁱⁱ Li Xue-mei, et al., "Clinical study on the Treatment of Chronic Eczema with plum-blossom needle," *Medical Innovation of China*, 2011 Vol 8, No 31.

^{iv} Li Fang Mei, "Dang Gui Yin Zi, Psoriasis Vulgaris Research on the Impact of Barrier Function of the Skin," *Hunan Univeristy of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2014.