

PEONY & ATRACTYLODES FORMULA TONG XIE YAO FANG

ORIGINS: Classical
formula, 1624

Peony and Atractylodes Formula (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is a classical formula known as “Important Formula for Painful Diarrhea” from Collected Treatises of (Zhang) Jing-Yue (*Jing Yue Quan Shu*) from 1624.

GENERAL SIGNS/SYMPTOMS

Peony and Atractylodes Formula (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is used for recurrent diarrhea accompanied by abdominal pain due to a liver/spleen disharmony. The primary pattern is spleen qi deficiency intensified by liver qi stagnation overacting on the middle burner and causing “intestinal wind.” There is generally an urgency to defecate with pain and discomfort subsiding upon defecation. Stool is generally low volume and often accompanied by borborygmus. A water or splash sound is common upon abdominal palpation/auscultation using a percussion technique.

Peony and Atractylodes Formula (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is used to treat abdominal cramping and painful diarrhea manifesting as loose stools with abdominal pain and cramping. The modern disease designations that are addressed by **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) include Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and colitis.

ACTIONS

1. Supplements spleen

3. Expels dampness

5. Reduces pain

2. Relaxes the liver

4. Arrests diarrhea

INGREDIENTS

PINYIN	LATIN	ENGLISH	PERCENT OF FORMULA
<i>Chao Bai Zhu</i> (chief)	<i>Atractylodes Macrocephalae</i> Rhizoma	White Atractylodes Rhizome, dry-fried	36.0%
<i>Chao Bai Shao</i> (chief)	<i>Paeoniae Radix, alba</i>	Chinese White Peony, dry-fried	23.0%
<i>Fang Feng</i> (assistant and envoy)	<i>Saposhnikoviae Radix</i>	Siler Root	23.0%
<i>Chao Chen Pi</i> (deputy)	<i>Citri Reticulatae</i> Pericarpium	Tangerine Peel, dry-fried	18.0%

GENERAL INDICATIONS / MODERN APPLICATIONS

- Abdominal pain, lower
- Blood in stool, bright red
- Borborygmus
- Colitis
- Constipation, chronic, from spleen qi deficiency
- Cramping, abdominal
- Diarrhea, painful
- Hiccups, post-operative
- Infant diarrhea with watery yellowish stool
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Meniere's disease
- Ulcer, gastric, discomfort from

FORMULA DISCUSSION

The pattern addressed by **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is one in which the liver has over-acted on the spleen to such an extent as to cause the spleen qi to collapse. When the spleen qi collapses, its transforming and transporting functions are impaired. It can no longer transform turbidity, allowing the turbidity to sink into the bowels. It can no longer transport efficiently and so the turbidity accumulates and the liver qi stagnates. When enough qi is backed up in the lower abdomen, pain develops and is only relieved by moving the bowels. Hence the Chinese name of the formula (in translation) “Important Formula for Painful Diarrhea.” **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is both tonifying and regulating. It is safe enough that it can be pulverized and given to infants who may not yet have developed sufficient strength in their new spleens to transform the turbidity in their food—leading to chronic yellow watery stools.

In modern times, **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is frequently prescribed to treat colitis and Irritable Bowel Syndrome. For these it is generally considered more appropriate when the colitis or IBS are of the diarrhea type rather than the constipation type, though the formula can certainly be effective for constipation, if there is spleen qi deficiency with liver qi constraint. One sign of liver qi stagnation is the presence of pain that is relieved when the bowels move; a superior sign is a wiry pulse. The excess of liver qi here is invading the spleen, so it is actually possible for the spleen pulse to be wiry, in spite of the fact that there is an underlying spleen qi deficiency in this pattern. The spleen's own qi is in failure and its channel has been invaded by the unrestrained liver. Therefore, a deficient pulse

FORMULA ACTIONS

- Supplements spleen
- Relaxes the liver
- Expels dampness
- Arrests diarrhea
- Reduces pain

TONGUE

Often normal; can be slightly purple, have a thick white coat, or be swollen with scallops on the sides.

PULSE

Wiry in the *guan* position on either side.

CONTRAINDICATIONS /

CAUTIONS

Do not use if diarrhea is from food stagnation. If patient has toxic dampness or damp-heat type diarrhea from acute infection, use **Wu Hua Formula** instead.

DOSAGE

2-3 tablets, 3 times a day.

in the spleen position is not an essential qualification for diagnosis in this pattern. A wiry pulse in the *guan* position on either side, however, is to be expected.

Liver over-acting on the spleen, in an earlier, less severe stage of development (that is, before spleen qi collapse has occurred) can take the form of abdominal distension, chronic borborygmus, or chronic hiccups. Meniere's disease can also develop from this pattern of accumulated turbidity with an overactive stagnant liver. In the case of Meniere's disease, there is still turbidity in the lower burner, but instead or in addition to causing abdominal pain, the rebellious liver qi, partially entangled in the turbidity, rises up into the head via its association with the gallbladder channel, dragging some of the turbidity with it. This disrupts the stability of the inner ear and the individual experiences some or all of the symptoms of Meniere's disease: vertigo, a sensation of fullness in the ear or head, and tinnitus. Note that in modern biomedicine, though they do not know the etiology of Meniere's disease, they have noted that the odds of developing Meniere's disease are greater in patients with IBS.ⁱ

SYNERGY OF INGREDIENTS

Of the four herbal ingredients that make up **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) two share the role of chief, a third substance functions as deputy, and the fourth serves the dual function of assistant and envoy. Three of the four ingredients are prepared by dry-frying (*chao*). Dry-frying enhances the ability of the herb to revive the spleen, and in the case of dry-fried white peony (*chao bai shao*) the dry-frying increases its power to calm and control the liver.

The two chiefs, dry-fried white atractylodes (*chao bai zhu*) and dry-fried white peony (*chao bai shao*) are both (in their raw/unfried form) important ingredients in the most famous formula for harmonizing the liver and spleen, Free and Easy Wanderer (*Xiao Yao San*). White peony (*bai shao*) is the strongest substance in the materia medica for softening the liver when its repletion is adversely affecting the sinews.ⁱⁱ White atractylodes is the premier herb for strengthening the spleen. Therefore, when pain is caused by a disharmony of spleen weakness and an overactive liver, this combination, especially when dry-fried, resolves the pain. Dry-fried white atractylodes (*chao bai zhu*) strongly dries dampness and regulates the spleen's role in water metabolism, thereby clearing the turbidity. It is one of the essential herbs for stopping diarrhea due to spleen weakness. Dry-fried white peony (*chao bai shao*) extinguishes wind and stops pain in the sinews by nourishing liver blood and softening the liver. It is an essential herb for any type of spasmodic pain or cramping. In a pattern of "painful diarrhea" the pain is directly addressed by the white peony (*bai shao*) while the diarrhea is resolved by the white atractylodes (*bai zhu*).

The deputy, dry-fried tangerine peel (*chao chen pi*), enhances the ability of the atractylodes to revive the spleen from pathogenic dampness. In its unprepared form, it is not directly tonifying like atractylodes (*bai zhu*), but it can help drain dampness from the lung and spleen. When dry-fried, tangerine peel (*chen pi*), gains the ability to tonify the spleen somewhat, but loses some of its ability to enter the lung. Dry-frying focuses the action of the tangerine peel (*chen pi*) on the middle burner where it combines synergistically with the atractylodes (*bai zhu*).

Siler (*fang feng*) is sometimes dry-fried, but not in the present formula. Here it acts both as assistant and as envoy, entering both the spleen and liver channels and guiding the whole formula to the intestines. Siler (*fang feng*) is the most important herb for quieting any kind of wind anywhere in the body. It regulates *wei* qi, which, guided by the stomach *fu*, is the qi that moves the muscles of peristalsis. Because it enters the liver it can extinguish internal wind affecting the sinews, thus acting as assistant to the white peony (*bai shao*). Its ability to enter the spleen channel means that it can eliminate wind that has passed from the sinews into the flesh; that is, it can relieve spasms

and cramping. Siler (*fang feng*) is a common herb to include in formulas that treat diarrhea and borborygmus. It has a mild ability to dry dampness. This action, along with its affinity for the spleen channel, comprises its role as assistant to the atractylodes (*bai zhu*).

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), diarrhea-predominant – This is one of the most common modern applications for **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*). A study was conducted to observe the effectiveness of **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) in the treatment of diarrhea-predominant IBS manifesting as liver stagnation with spleen deficiency. Ninety-eight patients were divided into a treatment group of 48 who were prescribed **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) and a control group of 50 who were prescribed ammonium tablets. Treatment course was 30 days. Symptoms before and after treatment were scored and again three months after treatment finished. The results showed an overall effectiveness rate of 89.5% for the treatment group and 76% effectiveness rate for the control group at the end of treatment. There was noticeable difference between the treatment group and the control group in improving diarrhea and bloating/distention. Both groups showed similar improvement of abdominal pain. The recurrence rate of recovered patients upon the three month follow up showed only 20% recurrence in the treatment group compared to 53.3% in the control group.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ulcerative Colitis – Ulcerative Colitis is another very commonly researched modern application for **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*). It is usually combined with other formulas or used with additional substances when treating this condition. Below is a research study using augmented **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*). See the **Formula Combinations** section at the end of this monograph for other frequently used formula combinations and treatment options.

Peony and Atractylodes Formula (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) was used to treat 60 patients diagnosed with ulcerative colitis marked by persistent and recurrent diarrhea, abdominal pain, mucous and/or bloody stools, urgency, thin sticky stool, and a colonoscopy showing multiple shallow ulcers in the intestinal mucosa during an attack. The formula consisted of white atractylodes (*bai zhu*), peony (*bai shao*), tangerine peel (*chen pi*), siler (*fang feng*); and was modified with black atractylodes (*cang zhu*), nutmeg (*rou dou kou*), chebula (*he zi*), codonopsis (*dang shen*), and astragalus (*huang qi*). Additions were made for: no desire to eat add mume fruit (*wu mei*), for severe

abdominal pain increase chebula (*he zi*), for long term diarrhea add charred cimicifuga rhizome (*chao sheng ma*), with yellow greasy tongue coat add coptis (*huang lian*), excessive dreaming and irritability add jujube seed (*suan zao ren*). Efficacy criteria was defined as 'cured' equaled complete remission with clinical symptoms disappeared and colonoscopy review showed mucosal lesions gone. 'Effective' meant clinical symptoms almost disappeared and colonoscopy review showed mild mucosa inflammation. 'Ineffective' resulted in no improvement in clinical symptoms and no improvement in colonoscopy review. The results showed 11 cases of complete remission (18.33%), 46 cases were deemed effective (76.67%), and three cases were deemed ineffective (5%), a total effective rate of 95%.^{iv}

FORMULA COMPARISONS

Ginseng and Astragalus Formula (*Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang*)

This is a classical formula to treat spleen qi deficiency while raising "sinking spleen qi". Often, when discussing diarrhea, it is due to spleen qi deficiency and the result of poor transportation and transformation function. When spleen qi is deficient, the ability of the body to hold things in place decreases and sinking qi occurs. This can present in different ways, one of which is chronic diarrhea. In Chinese medicine this is defined as "sinking of middle burner qi" or "sinking spleen qi." **Ginseng and Astragalus Formula** (*Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang*) stops diarrhea by strongly tonifying spleen qi and drawing the yang qi upward. In this pattern, the diarrhea is often worse after eating and worse when fatigued. Other common symptoms include gas, bloating, fatigue, spontaneous sweating, and little appetite. Generally, there will be no abdominal pain associated with this type of diarrhea. In comparison to **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*), both formulas treat spleen qi deficiency and both formulas address diarrhea. **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) has a stronger function to regulate the liver and stop pain. **Ginseng and Astragalus Formula** (*Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang*) does contain bupleurum (*chai hu*) in the formula, but in that formula's context the bupleurum serves more to raise the yang qi rather than regulate the liver. **Ginseng and Astragalus Formula** (*Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang*) may be a more suitable formula for the treatment of diarrhea if there is little to no liver involvement and the body's upbearing ability has been compromised.

Ginseng and Atractylodes Formula (*Shen Ling Bai Zhu San*)

This is a commonly used formula for diarrhea and loose

stools. This formula tonifies the spleen, clears damp, and stops diarrhea. Spleen qi deficiency leads to internal damp accumulation. This encumberment further diminishes spleen function and further inhibits the spleen's transportation and transformation function. **Ginseng and Atractylodes Formula** (*Shen Ling Bai Zhu San*) uses dry-fried dolichos seed (*chao bian dou*) and lotus seed (*lian zi*) to astringe and stop diarrhea, while supporting the root deficiency that led to the development of the diarrhea: spleen qi deficiency. It uses as its base formula **Major Four Herb Combination** (*Si Jun Zi Tang*) plus Chinese yam (*shan yao*). The rest of the formula consists of coix (*yi yi ren*), poria (*fu ling*), and amomi fruit (*sha ren*) to address the damp accumulation and further support spleen qi. When comparing this formula with **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) there is no action to regulate liver function. **Ginseng and Atractylodes Formula** (*Shen Ling Bai Zhu San*) will be optimal for "spleen deficiency with damp" type diarrhea, but will not be as effective to address abdominal pain and discomfort. It should be noted that these two formulas are a common combination in modern research for treating diarrhea.

Earth Harmonizing Formula (*He Tu Pian*)

This formula, like **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*), addresses chronic digestive disorders due to a liver/spleen disharmony. Both formulas address the underlying root cause of many digestion

problems: liver stagnation with spleen deficiency. **Earth Harmonizing Formula** (*He Tu Pian*) focuses more on regulating liver function while still supporting the spleen. It also has the added function to address food stagnation and clear a little heat, but the formula does not specifically arrest diarrhea. **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) is stronger to support spleen and more astringently stops diarrhea. **Earth Harmonizing Formula** (*He Tu Pian*) can be a good long-term formula to restore digestive function after using **Peony and Atractylodes Formula** (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) initially to stop the diarrhea and regulate the intestines.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Lopez-Escamez, Jose A.; Carey, John; Chung, Won-Ho; Goebel, Joel A.; Magnusson, Måns; Mandalà, Marco; Newman-Toker, David E.; Strupp, Michael; Suzuki, Mamoru (2015). "Diagnostic criteria for Menière's disease." ¹ *Journal of Vestibular Research: Equilibrium & Orientation*. 25 (1): 1–7.

ⁱⁱ Remember that peristaltic movement is governed by *wei qi* and that the intestines are considered to be in the realm of the sinews.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wang Ya Jun, et al., "Clinical Observation on the Treatment of Diarrhea Type Irritable Bowel Syndrome with Liver Stagnation and Spleen Deficiency Syndrome using Tong Xie Yao Fang," *Henan Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2013, No 1.

^{iv} He Zhi Guang, "Treating 60 Cases of Chronic Recurrent Ulcerative Colitis with Jia Wei Tong Xie Yao Fang," *Journal of Changchun University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2007, No 2.

USEFUL COMBINATIONS

For Diarrhea-type IBS	Combine with: • Bupleurum and Tang Kuei Formula (<i>Xiao Yao San</i>) to relieve stress-induced IBS with diarrhea • Chai Hu Shu Gan Formula (<i>Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang</i>) to augment the action to smooth Liver qi over-acting on the middle warmer • Six Gentlemen Formula (<i>Liu Jun Zi Tang</i>) for pronounced spleen qi deficiency with low appetite
For Ulcerative Colitis	Combine with: • Bupleurum and Aurantium Formula (<i>Si Ni San</i>) for pronounced stagnation in the middle warmer • Six Gentlemen Formula (<i>Liu Jun Zi Tang</i>) for pronounced spleen qi deficiency with low appetite • Mume Formula (<i>Wu Mei Wan</i>) for retching, vomiting and parasites • Pulsatilla Intestinal Formula (<i>Bai Tou Weng Li Chang Fang</i>) for painful diarrhea with heat-toxin
For Fatty Liver	Combine with Minor Bupleurum Formula (<i>Xiao Chai Hu Tang</i>)