



CLINICAL HERBALISM

## Winter Digestion: Three Key Formulas

The winter season is known for holiday celebrations and larger meals. For most people, this means ample amounts of sweet / fatty foods, while for others, it means more fatty, protein-rich foods. In both cases, this holiday overconsumption can lead to digestive disorders in both the upper GI and lower GI tract.

One of the most rewarding aspects of practicing Chinese medicine is helping patients quickly resolve these types of digestive disorders without having to constantly rely on taking digestive enzymes or over-the-counter medications for temporary, symptomatic relief, which only masks the deeper, underlying issues.

### Two TCM Patterns, Three TCM Patent Formulas

Two of the most common TCM patterns I see in the clinic related to digestive disorders due to overconsumption of rich holiday foods are food stagnation and liver / spleen disharmony. Three important TCM patent medicines target these patterns, which are often intermingled in symptomatic presentation. These patent medicines are *Bao He Wan*, *Jian Pi Wan* and *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang*. These patent medicines can be used to treat a wide array of gastric complaints that can arise suddenly during the holiday season due to simple overconsumption of foods rich in sugar, fat and heavy proteins.

### Bao He Wan



*Bao He Wan* ("Preserve Harmony Pill") resolves food stagnation, harmonizes the stomach, descends stomach *qi*, clears heat, dispels damp, and promotes digestion. This formula is typically used for excess conditions that show as a strong, slippery pulse and a greasy-sticky tongue coating which may be yellow or white.

I typically use this formula for patients who tend to overeat rich, fatty, high-protein foods, potentially combined with alcoholic drinks. For this all-too-common scenario (which I anticipate even in the age of COVID restrictions), this patent medicine can easily be taken in conjunction with ginger or fennel tea for quick-acting results. Patients can also take this formula before meals if they know they tend to overeat holiday meals rich in fat / protein.

This is the most common patent medicine I recommend to help patients phase off the chronic use of digestive enzyme supplements, which provide symptomatic relief, but often stop working; and for patients who tend to suffer upper GI complaints and use over-the-counter antacid medications. Unlike digestive enzyme supplements and OTC medications, *Bao He Wan* targets deeper, underlying pattern imbalances such as *qi* stagnation and stomach heat.

#### Jian Pi Wan

*Jian Pi Wan* ("Strengthen Spleen Pill") resolves food stagnation, harmonizes the stomach and spleen, descends stomach *qi*, tonifies spleen *qi*, and promotes overall digestion. This patent medicine is used in more deficient conditions which often show a weak / slippery pulse and a pale, swollen tongue - often with teeth marks and a potentially greasy coating.

*Jian Pi Wan* is an excellent patient medicine for patients who tend to have weak overall digestion, crave sweets, and suffer lower GI symptoms. For patients who tend to overeat breads, baked goods and sugary desserts, this can often be the perfect fit to quickly resolve gastric complaints.

For patients who tend to have both upper GI and lower GI symptoms, and / or present with heat

signs, *Jian Pi Wan* can easily be combined with *Bao He Wan* to more effectively target complex pattern presentations. *Jian Pi Wan* can also be combined with *Xiao Yao Wan* and taken long-term for patients who tend to have chronic weak digestion, and chronically crave carbohydrates and sweets.

### Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang

*Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* ("Aucklandia / Amomum Nourish Stomach Decoction") dispels damp, dissolves phlegm, harmonizes the stomach, descends stomach *qi*, tonifies spleen *qi*, soothes the liver, promotes digestion, and stops nausea. This patent medicine tends to be used for more excess conditions which present as a wiry / slippery pulse with a normal tongue, or a tongue which is swollen with a sticky, greasy coat.

*Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* is ideal for patients who overeat and present with stagnation of *qi*, damp or phlegm, with a concomitant underlying spleen *qi* deficiency. This is an extremely common pattern presentation to see during the holiday season and in patients who take prescription or over-the-counter proton-pump inhibitors for GERD.

In patients who tend to have chronic loose stools when overeating, combining *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* with *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* can be extremely effective. Depending upon the underlying pattern presentations, *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* can also be combined with *Jian Pi Wan*, *Bao He Wan* or *Xiao Yao Wan* until major symptoms calm.

### Clinical Take-Home Points

I hope this short article provides some inspiration for clinicians to offer solutions to patients who suffer from gastric complaints due to holiday overeating. The key benefits of using TCM patent medicines over digestive enzyme supplements or over-the-counter medications is simple: Patent medicine not only treat acute symptoms effectively, but also target the deeper, underlying imbalances which express as the patient's unique pattern of disharmony.

Targeting the deeper imbalances can often allow patients to stop relying on the chronic use of supplements and experience deeper states of overall health and vitality, allowing them to have a more enjoyable holiday season.

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