

# Herbal Monograph for Xiao Chai Hu Tang

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*Xiao chai hu tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) is one of the most commonly used herbal formulas today. Historically, it was used to treat *shaoyang* syndrome. Today, it is used to successfully treat many disorders including hepatitis, liver fibrosis, liver cancer, jaundice, cholecystitis, cholelithiasis, pancreatitis, nephritis, acute tonsillitis, parotitis, stomatitis and many more. To achieve optimal therapeutic outcome, it is of critical importance to learn beyond the traditional aspect of this formula. Understanding of topics such as pharmacological effect, clinical studies and research, toxicology and herb-drug interactions will greatly empower the practitioners to properly select the best herbal formula for treatment. Listed below is the herbal monograph on *Xiao chai hu tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction), an excerpt from *Chinese Herbal Formulas and Applications* by John and Tina Chen, to be published by Art of Medicine Press in fall, 2007.

*Xiao Chai Hu Tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction)

Pinyin Name: *Xiao Chai Hu Tang*

Literal Name: Minor Bupleurum Decoction

Alternate Names: *Hsiao Tsai Hu Tang*, Minor Bupleurum Combination

Original Source: *Shang Han Lun* (Discussion of Cold-Induced Disorders) by Zhang Zhong-Jing in the Eastern Han Dynasty

## Composition

<i>Chai Hu</i> (Radix bupleuri)	24g [12g]
<i>Huang Qin</i> (Radix scutellariae)	9g [9g]
<i>Ban Xia</i> (Rhizoma pinelliae), <i>xi</i> (washed)	0.5 cup [9g]
<i>Sheng Jiang</i> (Rhizoma zingiberis recens), <i>qie</i> (sliced "Slicing")	9g [9g]
<i>Ren Shen</i> (Radix et rhizoma ginseng)	9g [6g]
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i> (Radix et rhizoma glycyrrhizae praeparata cum melle)	9g [5g]
<i>Da Zao</i> (Fructus jujubae), <i>bo</i> (opened)	12 pieces [4 pieces]

## Dosage/Preparation/Administration

The source text specifies to cook the ingredients in 12 cups [2400 mL] of water until 6 cups [1200 mL] of the liquid remain. Discard the residue and cook the strained decoction again until it is reduced to 3 cups [600 mL]. Take 1 cup [200 mL] of warm decoction per dose, three times daily. Today, the decoction may be prepared using the dosages suggested in brackets.

## Chinese Therapeutic Actions

Harmonizes *shaoyang*

### Clinical Manifestations

1. *Shaoyang* syndrome: alternating spells of fever and chills, chest and hypochondriac fullness and discomfort, irritability, a bitter taste in the mouth, lack of appetite, nausea, vomiting, vertigo, a dry throat, a thin, white tongue coating and a wiry pulse.
2. Any of the following disorders with *shaoyang* characteristics: gynecological disorders with heat in the uterus, liver or *chong* (thoroughfare) channel; malaria; jaundice; or any internal injury characterized by *shaoyang* syndrome.

### Clinical Applications

Hepatitis, viral hepatitis, chronic hepatitis, hepatic fibrosis and carcinoma, hepatocellular carcinomas, jaundice, cholecystitis, cholelithiasis, pancreatitis, fever, fever in cancer, nephritis, chronic renal insufficiency, acute tonsillitis, infectious parotitis, stomatitis, common cold, influenza, measles, bronchitis, pneumonia, pulmonary tuberculosis, cough, allergic rhinitis, bronchial asthma, reflux esophagitis, antral gastritis, gastritis, gastric pain, gastric prolapse, constipation, Meniere's syndrome, dizziness, seizures, migraine, angina, depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, morning sickness, postpartum infection, postpartum fever, dysmenorrhea, premenstrual syndrome and malaria.

### Explanation

*Xiao chai hu tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) is the main formula for harmonizing *shaoyang* syndrome, one of the six stages of disease progression described in *Shang Han Lun* (discussion of cold-induced disorders). The *shaoyang* is situated between yang and yin, or between the exterior and interior; therefore, alternating spells of fever and chills may occur in *shaoyang* syndrome if the body is fighting both the pathogens outside and the disharmony inside.

Disorders in the *shaoyang* might cause qi stagnation and eventual heat formation in the gallbladder channel (a *shaoyang* channel), giving rise to chest and hypochondriac fullness and discomfort, a bitter taste in the mouth, vertigo, a dry throat and irritability. Lack of appetite, nausea and vomiting are the results of gallbladder heat invading the stomach. The tongue coating is thin and white because the pathogenic factors have not yet transformed into internal heat. The wiry pulse is the result of *qi* stagnation in the *shaoyang* channel.

Because the disease resides between the exterior and the interior, it is not suitable to use only exterior-releasing herbs or only purgative herbs. Use of only exterior-releasing herbs will not treat the interior condition, and use of only heat-clearing or downward-draining herbs will bring the pathogens from the exterior into the interior. Therefore, the harmonizing method is the most appropriate treatment approach in this condition.

*Chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) is the main herb for treating *shaoyang* disorders. The light quality of *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) lifts and disperses stagnation, as well as releases to the exterior. *Huang qin* (Radix scutellariae), a bitter and cold herb that enters the gallbladder channel, is ideal for clearing *shaoyang* heat. Together, *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) disperses the exterior while *huang qin* (Radix scutellariae) clears the interior to achieve the harmonizing effect. *Ban xia* (Rhizoma pinelliae), besides harmonizing the stomach to relieve nausea and vomiting, disperses stagnation in the body. *Sheng jiang* (Rhizoma

zingiberis recens) helps *ban xia* (Rhizoma pinelliae) harmonize the middle *jiao*. It also reduces the toxicity of *ban xia* (Rhizoma pinelliae). *Ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng), *zhi gan cao* (Radix et rhizoma glycyrrhizae praeparata cum melle), and *da zao* (Fructus jujubae) tonify stomach *qi*, nourish body fluids and harmonize the *ying* (nutritive) and *wei* (defensive) levels. The combination of *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) and *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng) also provides a mutual check and balance for each other: *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) prevents the tonic effect of *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng) from retaining the pathogens in the body, while *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng) prevents the dispersing effect of *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri) from damaging *qi*. Combined, these herbs expel the pathogens and strengthen bodily constitution.

Because the *shaoyang* stage is unstable and often short and transient, the symptoms listed above may not be clinically present all at the same time. Therefore, as suggested in *shang han lun* (discussion of cold-induced disorders), this formula can be applied even if there is only one *shaoyang* symptom clinically present.

Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Decoction)			
Diagnosis	Signs and Symptoms	Treatment	Herbs
<i>Shaoyang</i> syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternating spells of fever and chills: the location of the illness between exterior and interior.</li> <li>• Chest and hypochondriac fullness and discomfort: <i>qi</i> stagnation.</li> <li>• A bitter taste in the mouth, a dry throat, and irritability: heat in the <i>shaoyang</i> gallbladder channel.</li> <li>• Lack of appetite, nausea, and vomiting: gallbladder heat invading the stomach.</li> <li>• Thin, white tongue coating: exterior condition.</li> <li>• Wiry pulse: <i>qi</i> stagnation.</li> </ul>	Harmonizes <i>shaoyang</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Chai hu</i> (Radix bupleuri) releases the exterior, and <i>huang qin</i> (Radix scutellariae) clears the interior. Together, they harmonize <i>shaoyang</i> disorders.</li> <li>• <i>Ban xia</i> (Rhizoma pinelliae) harmonizes the stomach to relieve nausea and vomiting, and disperses stagnation.</li> <li>• <i>Sheng jiang</i> (Rhizoma zingiberis Recens) harmonizes the middle <i>jiao</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Ren shen</i> (Radix et rhizoma ginseng), <i>zhi gan cao</i> (Radix et rhizoma glycyrrhizae praeparata cum melle), and <i>da zao</i> (Fructus jujubae) tonify Stomach <i>qi</i>, nourish body fluids, and harmonize the <i>ying</i> (nutritive) and <i>wei</i> (defensive) levels.</li> </ul>

## Modifications

### General Signs and Symptoms:

- If accompanied by headache, add *chuan xiong* (Rhizoma chuanxiong).
- If there is thirst, remove *ban xia* (Rhizoma pinelliae) and add *tian hua fen* (Radix trichosanthis).
- With thirst and irritability from deficiency in heat, add *mai dong* (Radix ophiopogonis) and *wu wei zi* (Fructus schisandrae chinensis).
- If there is no thirst but a slight fever and exterior symptoms are present, remove *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng) and add *gui zhi* (Ramulus cinnamomi).
- With irritability, add *dan zhu ye* (Herba lophatheri) and *geng mi* (Semen oryzae).
- With more irritability but absence of nausea or vomiting, remove *ban xia* (Rhizoma pinelliae) and *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng) and add *gua lou* (Fructus trichosanthis).
- With abdominal pain, remove *huang qin* (Radix cutellariae) and add *bai shao* (Radix paeoniae).

alba).

- With more vomiting or nausea, add *sheng jiang* (Rhizoma zingiberis recens) and *chen pi* (Pericarpium citri reticulatae).
- When there is indigestion in children, add *bai zhu* (Rhizoma atractylodis macrocephalae), *chen pi* (Pericarpium citri reticulatae), *fu ling* (Poria) and *shan zha* (Fructus crataegi).
- If there is gum pain caused by yin deficiency, add *shi gao* (Gypsum fibrosum).
- With palpitations and dysuria, remove *huang qin* (Radix scutellariae) and add *fu ling* (Poria).
- With distention and hardness of the hypochondriac area caused by phlegm accumulation, remove *da zao* (Fructus jujubae) and add *mu li* (Concha ostreae).
- If the hypochondriac pain is severe, add *qing pi* (Pericarpium citri reticulatae viride), *bai shao* (Radix paeoniae alba) and *xiang fu* (Rhizoma cyperi).
- With a stifling sensation in the chest, add *zhi shi* (Fructus aurantii immaturus) and *qing pi* (Pericarpium citri reticulatae viride).

#### Infectious Disorders:

- For common colds, add *jing jie* (Herba schizonepetae), *fang feng* (Radix saposhnikoviae) and *ge gen* (Radix puerariae lobatae).
- For influenza, add *jin yin hua* (Flos lonicerae japonicae), *lian qiao* (Fructus forsythiae) and *ban lan gen* (Radix isatidis).
- For acute bronchitis, add *jie geng* (Radix platycodonis), *zhi qiao* (Fructus aurantii), *ku xing ren* (Semen armeniacae amarum) and *bai bu* (Radix stemonae).
- For chronic bronchitis, add *fu ling* (Poria), *chen pi* (Pericarpium citri reticulatae), *zi wan* (Radix et rhizoma asteris) and *kuan dong hua* (Flos farfarae).
- For acute otitis media, add *long dan* (Radix et rhizoma gentianae) and *zhi zi* (Fructus gardeniae).
- For urinary tract infection, add *bian xu* (Herba polygoni avicularis), *che qian cao* (Herba plantaginis) and *hai jin sha* (Spora lygodii).
- For malaria, add *chang shan* (Radix dichroae), *bing lang* (Semen arecae) and *wu mei* (Fructus mume).

#### Liver and Gallbladder Disorders:

- For icteric jaundice and hepatitis, add *zhi shi* (Fructus aurantii immaturus), *yin chen* (Herba artemisiae scopariae), *bai shao* (Radix paeoniae alba) and *jin qian cao* (Herba lysimachiae).
- For damp-heat jaundice, add *yin chen* (Herba artemisiae scopariae), *zhi zi* (Fructus gardeniae) and *ban lan gen* (Radix isatidis).
- For jaundice with more heat, add *zhi zi* (Fructus gardeniae) and *huang bo* (Cortex phellodendri chinensis).
- For jaundice resulting from hepatitis or cholecystitis, add *zhi shi* (Fructus aurantii immaturus), *yin chen* (Herba artemisiae scopariae), *bai shao* (Radix paeoniae alba) and *jin qian cao* (Herba lysimachiae).

#### Gynecological Disorders:

- For postpartum wind invasion with perspiration, remove *chai hu* (Radix bupleuri).
- For postpartum wind invasion without fever, remove *huang qin* (Radix scutellariae).
- For postpartum wind invasion with increased vomiting or nausea, increase the dosage of *sheng jiang* (Rhizoma zingiberis recens).
- For postpartum wind invasion with marked deficiency, increase the dosage of *ren shen* (Radix et rhizoma ginseng).
- When there is wind invasion during the menstrual period, add *niu xi* (Radix achyranthis).

bidentatae), *tao ren* (Semen persicae) and *mu dan pi* (Cortex moutan).

### Cautions/Contraindications

- *Xiao chai hu tang* should be used with caution in patients of yin and/or blood deficiencies, in patients of upper excess and lower deficiency, or in patients of liver fire. Inappropriate use of this formula may result in headache, dizziness or bleeding gums.
- In general, there is no sweating associated with relief of symptoms following the administration of *Xiao chai hu tang*, since it harmonizes, rather than releases the exterior. However, some patients do show sweating prior to recovery. They should be monitored closely to prevent excessive sweating from injuring yin.
- Avoid cold, raw, pungent and spicy foods while taking this formula.<sup>1</sup>

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*Editor's Note:* [Part 2](#) of this article will appear in the August 2007 issue of *Acupuncture Today*.

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