Some Chinese folk prescriptions for wind-cold type common cold

Zhai Hai-long a, *, Chen Shimin b, Lu Yalan b

a Hubei Polytechnic University, School of Medicine, Huangshi, Hubei, China
b Hematology Department of Huangshi Central Hospital, China

ABSTRACT

Although self-limiting, the common cold (感冒gān mào) is highly prevalent. There are no effective antivirals to cure the common cold and few effective measures to prevent it. However, for thousands of years, Chinese people have treated the common cold with natural herbs. According to the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) theory (中医学zhōng yí xué), the common cold is considered as an exterior syndrome, which can be further divided into the wind-cold type (風寒型fēng hán xíng), the wind-heat type (風熱型fēng rè xíng), and the summer heat dampness type (暑濕型shǔ rú xíng). Since the most common type of common cold caught in winter and spring is the wind-cold type, the article introduced some Chinese folk prescriptions for the wind-cold type common cold with normal and weak physique, respectively. For thousands of years, Chinese folk prescriptions for the common cold, as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM; 补充与替代zhōng yí tì dà), have been proven to be effective, convenient, cheap, and most importantly, safe. The Chinese folk prescriptions (中國民間處方zhòng guó mín jiān chǔ fāng) for the wind-cold type common cold are quite suitable for general practitioners or patients with the wind-cold type common cold, to treat the disease. Of course, their pharmacological features and mechanisms of action need to be further studied.

1. Introduction

The common cold (感冒gān mào) or common acute upper respiratory tract infection, is an acute viral infectious disease of the upper respiratory tract caused by rhinovirus, human coronavirus, parainfluenza virus, adenoviruses, respiratory syncytial virus, etc. Symptoms which often appear, such as sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, cough, and malaise, are usually worse in 1–3 days and can last 7–10 days, and sometimes as long as 3 weeks. Although self-limiting, the common cold is highly prevalent. The disease affects adults approximately two to three times/year and children under the age of 2 years, approximately six times/year.

Colds are also costly. It is estimated that direct medical costs in the United States, including physician visits, secondary infections, and medications for colds, were an estimated $17 billion/year in 1997. Indirect costs from missed work for illness or to look after a sick child were an estimated $25 billion/year.4

Because there are no effective antivirals to cure the common cold and few effective measures to prevent it, treatment should focus on symptom relief. The most commonly used treatments include over-the-counter antihistamines, decongestants, cough suppressants, and expectorants. These treatments can be used alone or in combination.2

Treatment of the common cold in traditional Chinese medicine (中醫zhōng yí; TCM) is based on pattern differentiation. According to the TCM theory, the common cold is considered as an exterior syndrome, which can be further divided into the wind-cold type (風寒型fēng hán xíng), the wind-heat type (風熱型fēng rè xíng), and the summer heat dampness type (暑濕型shǔ rú xíng).3

The most common type of common cold often caught in winter and spring is the wind-cold type. For thousands of years, Chinese people have treated the wind-cold type common cold with natural herbs, some of which were quite simple, effective, widely used by folk ordinary people, and were called folk prescriptions. However, physical conditions of patients with the wind-cold type are different, i.e., some are normal and others are weak. Therefore, treatment should be chosen in accordance with...
the patient’s individuality according to the TCM theory. This article introduces some Chinese folk prescriptions (中國民間處方 zhòng guó mín jiàn chǔ fàng) for the wind-cold type common cold with in patients with normal and weak physique.

2. Some Chinese folk prescriptions (中國民間處方 zhòng guó mín jiàn chǔ fàng) for the wind-cold type (風寒型 fēng hán xíng) common cold (感冒gǎn mào) with normal physique

The typical wind-cold type common cold with normal physique, which is the majority of the wind-cold type common cold, is characterized by a history of catching cold, feeling cold, and nasal congestion with clear snot (鼻塞流清涕 bì sè liú qīng tì). Treatment for the wind-cold type common cold with normal physique includes “expelling wind dispersing cold (祛風散寒 qū fēng sàn hán)” and “relieving exterior syndrome by diaphoresis (發汗解表 fā hàn jiě biǎo).” The following are some recommended Chinese folk prescriptions, many of which contain ginger (生姜 shēng jiāng), an acrid and warm herb relieving exterior syndrome in TCM and also an edible food in China.

Ginger combined with scallion stalk (蔥白 cōng bái) and brown sugar (紅糖 hóng tāng): 30 g of sliced ginger, 10 g of scallion stalk, and approximate 100 mL of water are put into a pot. Then, the pot is heated softly by a fire until the decoction inside the pot is boiled. After that, add 100–160 g of brown sugar into the decoction for a better taste. Drink the warm decoction (溫熱溫 re), and then brew with boiling water for 5 minutes. The upper liquid can be drunk three times daily.

Orange peel (橘皮 jú pí), ginger, and brown sugar: orange peel and ginger, both 15 g, are processed by the same way mentioned above for scallion stalk and ginger. Drink the warm decoction after adding 10–20 g of brown sugar.

Ginger, tea (茶 chá), brown sugar, and vinegar (醋 cù): two pieces of ginger, 3 g tea, 10 g brown sugar, and 10 mL vinegar are put into a cup, and then brewed with boiling water for 5 minutes. The upper liquid can be drunk three times daily.

Hot noodle soup with white pepper (白胡椒 bái hú jiāo) porridge: a bowl of hot noodle soup is cooked, and appropriate amounts of white pepper powder and scallion stalk are added to it. Eat the noodle while it is hot and lie down covered with a quilt. After sweating, the cold is cured.

Simple decoction 1: Radix Saposhnikoviae (防風 fánghéng), Schizonepeta (荆芥 jīng jiè), Peucedanum praeruptorum (前胡 qián hú), Radix bupleuri (柴胡 chái hú), Rhizoma et Radix Notopterygii (the rhizome and root of Notopterygium incisum Ting ex H.T. Chang or Notopterygium forbesii Boiss; 菊溝 què hú), Plantodoc gran-diflorum (枝梗 jī gěng) all 10 g, Fructus Aurantii (the unripe fruits of Citrus aurantium L.; 枳實 zhí shí) 5 g, and Ligusticum wallichii (川芎 chuān xiōng) 3 g are decocted together with water. The obtained water solution can be taken for the wind-cold type cold.

Simple decoction 2: Schizonepeta 10 g, perilla leaf (紫蘇葉 zǐ suō yè) 10 g, tea 6 g, and ginger 6 g are decocted together with water. Add 20 g brown sugar into the decoction. The decoction can be used to treat the wind-cold type common cold especially characterized by headache, fever, and a stuffy nose.

Simple decoction 3: the mixture, which consists of honey (蜂蜜 fēng mì) and ginger juice at a ratio of 1:1, can be taken to treat the common cold without type differentiation according to the author’s opinion. However, honey and ginger are warm heat (溫熱 wēnnèi) according to TCM, so the mixture is actually more suitable to treat the wind-cold type cold.

2.1. Some Chinese folk prescriptions for the wind-cold type common cold with weak physique

In weak patients with the wind-cold type common cold, their syndrome includes poor appetite (食慾不振 shí yù bù zhěn), fatigue (乏力 fá lì), spontaneous sweating (自汗 zì hàn), fear of wind (風畏 fēng wèi), and recurring cold besides the syndrome mentioned in the beginning of the last part. Treatment for the wind-cold type common cold with weak physique are “relieving the exterior syndrome by replenishing qi (益氣解表 yì qì jiě biǎo),” and “supplement vacuity by support right (扶正補虛 fú zhèng bǔ xū).” Dietary therapies (食療 shí liáo) are often added to the treatment. Here several decoctions are recommended.

Jade Wind-Barrier Powder (Yupingfeng powder; 玉屏風散 yù píng fēng sān): Yupingfeng powder is a well-known ancient prescription invented by Wei Shilin, a famous physician in the Yuan Dynasty. The prescription including Radix Astragali (黃耆 huáng qí), Atractylodes macrocephala Koidz (白朮 bái zhú), and Radix Saposhnikoviae was also used to treat weak patients with the wind-cold type common cold. The prescription can improve those patients’ symptoms and reduce recurrent cases.

Radix Astragali-crucian decoction (黃耆漿漿 huáng qí jiǔ yù táng): the decoction is composed of crucian 150 g, Radix Astragali 15 g, Atractylodes macrocephala 6 g, and Radix Saposhnikoviae 3 g. Radix Astragali, Atractylodes macrocephala, and Radix Saposhnikoviae, which are actually three components of Yupingfeng powder mentioned above, are decocted together, then crucian is added into the decoction and decocted until boiling. After that, scallion and ginger are added and decocted with soft fire until the fish is cooked. Finally, some salt is added as flavoring. Eat the fish and drink the soup, and patients, especially “debility in old age (年老體衰 nián lǎo tǐ shuāi),” with the wind-cold type common cold will be cured.

Purple perilla (紫蘇 zǐ suō) porridge: 50 g of rice are put into a pot, with water added, and cooked. When the porridge is nearly cooked, 10 g of perilla leaves are added. Then the porridge should be boiled for a little while. Eat the porridge. The purple perilla porridge is specified for weak patients with the wind-cold type common cold.

Scallion stalk porridge: three to five scallion stalks and 100 g of rice are stewed together to cook porridge. Eat the porridge when it is warm. The porridge is suitable for aged weak people with the wind-cold type common cold.

3. Conclusion

For thousands of years, Chinese folk prescriptions (中國民間處方 zhòng guó mín jiàn chǔ fàng) for the common cold (感冒gǎn mào),
as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM; 補充與替代醫學 bù chōng yǔ tài dé yì xué), have been proven to be effective. Simi-
larly, CAM products such as *Andrographis paniculata* (Kalmcold; 穿心蓮 chuan xin lian), *Echinacea purpurea*, and *Pelargonium sidoides* (geranium) extract (Umcka Coldcare) were reported effective for the common cold in adults. They are also convenient, cheap, and most importantly, safe; some of them are even daily edible foods such as ginger, scallion stalk, and porridge, i.e., there are no obvious untoward reactions compared with the abovementioned treatments like over-the-counter drugs. Chinese folk prescriptions for the wind-cold type common cold are quite suitable for general practitioners or patients with the wind-cold type common cold to treat the disease. Of course, their pharmacological features and mechanisms of action need to be further studied.

**Conflicts of interest**

All contributing authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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