

DOWNWARD-DRAINING HERBS

Revised: 8/28/2019

Sources:

- Bensky, D. (2004). *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica*. Seattle, WA: Eastland Press. pp. 235-263
- Chen, J. and Chen, T. (2004). *Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology*. Art of Medicine Press. pp. 256-297

Downward-Draining Herbs

Downward-Draining Herbs promote movement through the large intestine. This can be done to relieve constipation, or as a way to drain heat out of the body.

Purgatives - These herbs strongly induce diarrhea and should not be used with seniors, children, or people with a weak constitution. They are typically bitter and cold, and they treat constipation due to heat.

Moist Laxatives - These herbs tend to be oily seeds. Unlike Purgatives, Moist Laxatives gently relieve constipation and may take some time to work.

Harsh Expellants - These herbs are very strong and usually toxic. They should only be used in small doses, and only if the patient is strong enough to take them.

Harsh Expellants induce watery diarrhea to treat severe edema in the chest and abdomen (e.g. pleurisy, ascites). Three of Gan Cao's incompatible herbs belong to this category (Gan Sui, Da Ji, Yuan Hua).

Downward-Draining Herbs

PURGATIVES:

- dà huáng
- máng xiāo
- fān xiè yè
- lú huì

MOIST LAXATIVES:

- huǒ má rén
- yù lǐ rén

HARSH EXPELLANTS:

- gān suì
- qiān niú zǐ
- dà jǐ
- bā dòu

Downward Draining Herbs

	Purgatives	Moist Laxatives	Harsh Expellants
Taste:	• bitter	• sweet	• toxic
Temperature:	• cold	• neutral	• cold (or hot)
Channels:	• LI	• LI	• LI, KI, LU
Cautions & Contraindications:	Use caution in deficiency/pregnancy		Use caution in deficiency/pregnancy
Main Action:	Purge LI, clear heat	Moisten LI to gently relieve constipation	Purge water

dà huáng

rhei radix et rhizoma

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter
Channels: HT, LI, LV, ST
Dosage: 3-15 grams (for purgative effect, cook only 3-5 min.)

大
黄

1. purges Large Intestine to relieve constipation
 - for Yang Ming Bowel disease (fever, constipation, abdominal pain)
2. clears heat and drains fire
 - for heat in the intestines and upper body (fever, sore throat, painful eyes)
 - cools blood to stop bleeding (hemorrhoids, blood in stool); use charred
3. invigorates blood
 - for fixed, sharp pain; abdominal masses; amenorrhea due to stagnation
 - for injury and trauma (can be used externally)
4. dries dampness to relieve jaundice



dà huáng

rhei radix et rhizoma

(continued)

- Because it is so strong, Da Huang is nicknamed **The General** (Jian Jun)
- Da Huang is used for **Yang Ming Bowel disease**, characterized by heat bind in the Stomach and Large Intestine, abdominal pain that worsens with pressure, and constipation
- Because it purges the Large Intestine, clears heat, invigorates blood, and stops bleeding, Da Huang is especially useful for **Large Intestine abscess and appendicitis**
- Da Huang is so strong at invigorating blood, it is said that it “cracks the blood.” Because of its strong moving action and its strong downward action, it is **contraindicated during pregnancy**
- **Use caution during breastfeeding**, as its purgative effect may come through in the breastmilk
- Da Huang can **used in its charred form to stop bleeding**, especially for hemorrhoid and blood in the stool. This is useful because it can stop bleeding without causing stagnation.
- Da Huang is so good and invigorating blood and clearing heat, it can be **used topically for injury and trauma** when there is redness, swelling and heat, as in San Huang San (nicknamed *Herbal Ice*)

大
黄

máng xiāo

natrii sulfus

Temp: very cold
Taste: acrid, bitter, salty
Channels: ST, LI
Dosage: 6-18 grams (stir in at end)

芒
硝

1. softens hardness to relieve constipation
 - commonly used with Da Huang to purge the Large Intestine
2. clears heat toxicity
 - for acute appendicitis, Large Intestine abscess
 - used internally or externally to treat skin problems
 - for early stage breast abscess, poor lactation



Mang Xiao is gluber's salt (sodium sulfate). It's salt, so it's salty in flavor.
Mang Xiao is also contraindicated during pregnancy.

fān xiè yè

sennae folium

Temp: cold
Taste: sweet, bitter
Channels: LI
Dosage: 1.5-3 grams (prepare as tea; dosage can be adjusted by patient)

番
泻
叶

1. purges Large Intestine to relieve constipation
 - promotes movement in Large Intestine
 - often used as single herb



Fan Xie Ye is senna leaf. It can be prepared as a tea, with the dosage and steeping time adjusted by the patient (too strong and it may cause abdominal cramping).

lú huì

aloe

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter
Channels: LI, LV, ST
Dosage: 1.5-4.5 grams (used in pills or tablets; do not decoct)

1. purges Large Intestine to relieve constipation
2. strongly clears heat from Liver and Gallbladder
 - for dizziness, headaches, tinnitus, red eyes, irritability
3. kills Large Intestine parasites
 - esp. for roundworms; also for tinea

This is the dried, bitter latex from the outer leaf of the aloe plant. It is completely different from aloe vera gel. It is especially useful for constipation due to Liver heat, or with parasites.

Since Lu Hui is so strong at both purging the Large Intestine and draining heat, it is usually used as a last resort after more gentle herbs have proved ineffective. Lu Hui is contraindicated in pregnancy. It can be excreted through breastmilk and act as a purgative for a breastfeeding baby.



芦荟

huǒ má rén

cannabis semen

Temp: neutral
Taste: sweet
Channels: LI, SP, ST
Dosage: 9-15 grams (crush before decocting)

1. moistens Large Intestine to relieve constipation
 - for dry constipation due to yin or blood deficiency
 - for constipation after febrile disease, in the elderly, or postpartum
2. nourishes yin
3. clears heat and heals sores
 - used internally or externally for mouth sores due to Stomach heat
 - mild; used as an auxiliary herb

Overuse of Huo Ma Ren can cause upset stomach or mild shen problems (agitation, restlessness, confusion).



火麻仁

yù lǐ rén

pruni semen

Temp: neutral

Taste: acrid, bitter, sweet

Channels: LI, SI, SP

Dosage: 3-9 grams (crush before decocting)

1. moistens Large Intestine to relieve constipation
 - esp for constipation due to dryness or qi stagnation
2. promotes urination to treat edema
 - mild; used as an auxiliary herb



郁
李
仁

gān suì

kansui radix

Temp: cold

Taste: bitter, sweet, toxic

Channels: KI, LI, LU

Dosage: 0.5-1.5 grams

1. induces watery diarrhea to treat edema
 - for severe accumulation of fluid in the chest and abdomen
 - for general edema, facial edema, abdominal distention
2. drives out phlegm
 - for severe phlegm accumulation, e.g. seizures due to wind-phlegm, shen problems due to phlegm
3. used topically to reduce swelling
 - for skin problems due to damp-heat



"This is a violent, cathartic herb that causes one to pass water anally." -Bensky
Contraindicated during pregnancy.

甘
遂

qiān niú zǐ

pharbitidis semen

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter, acrid, slightly toxic
Channels: KI, LI, LU, SI
Dosage: 3-6 grams in decoction (crush before decocting); 1.5-3 grams as powder

1. drains water and promotes urination

- expels water through both the urine and the stool
- esp. for edema in the Lung, ascites
- for damp-heat or food stagnation in the Stomach and Intestines

2. drives out phlegm

- for cough, wheezing, fullness in chest due to thin mucus in the Lung

3. kills Large Intestine parasites

- for roundworm and tapeworm

This is morning glory seed. Contraindicated during pregnancy.



牽
牛
子

dà jǐ

knoxiae/euphorbiae radix

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter, acrid, toxic
Channels: KI, LI, SP
Dosage: 1.5-3 grams

1. induces watery diarrhea to treat edema

- for accumulation of fluids in the chest and flank

2. use externally to clear heat toxicity

- for red, swollen, painful sores or scrofula

Da Ji can refer to two different herbs: Hong Da Ji (*knoxiae radix*) or Jing Da Ji (*euphorbiae pekinensis radix*). They have the same properties, except Jing Da Ji is stronger and more toxic. Jing Da Ji is incompatible with Gan Cao.

These are different from Da Ji (*cirsii japonici radix*) which stops bleeding.



大
戟

bā dòu

crotonis fructus

巴豆

Temp: hot
Taste: acrid, toxic
Channels: ST, LI, LU
Dosage: 0.1-0.3 grams (used in pills or tablets; do not decoct)

1. drains cold stagnation downward
 - for constipation, abdominal fullness and pain due to cold
2. drives water retention in chest and abdomen
 - for ascites, e.g. in end-stage schistosomiasis (parasitic worms)
3. expels cold-phlegm
 - for throat obstruction, shen problems due to phlegm
4. used topically to treat skin problems
 - promotes healing of abscesses and ulcers



Contraindicated during pregnancy. 20 drops of oil from Ba Dou can be fatal due to fluid loss.
 "Traditionally, it was regarded as the herbal equivalent of a battering ram." -Bensky

Summary

da huang <i>rhei radix et rhizoma</i>	purges Large Intestine • drains heat through intestines	• invigorates blood • dries dampness (jaundice)
mang xiao <i>natrii sulfus</i>	purges Large Intestine • softens hardness	• clears heat toxicity
fan xie ye <i>sennae folium</i>	purges Large Intestine • promotes movement	
lu hui <i>aloe</i>	purges Large Intestine	• clears LV/GB heat • kills LI parasites
huo ma ren <i>cannabis semen</i>	moistens Large Intestine	• nourishes yin
yu li ren <i>pruni semen</i>	moistens Large Intestine	
gan sui <i>kansui radix</i>	induces diarrhea to treat edema	• drives out phlegm • topically for swelling
qian niu zi <i>pharbitidis semen</i>	induces diarrhea and promotes urination to treat edema	• drives out phlegm • kills LI parasites
da ji <i>knoxiae/euphorbiae radix</i>	induces diarrhea to treat edema	• clears heat toxicity
ba dou <i>crotonis fructus</i>	drains cold stagnation	• topically for skin problems