

HERBS THAT TRANSFORM PHLEGM AND STOP COUGH

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Sources:

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Herbs that Transform Phlegm and Stop Cough

Phlegm (痰 tán) is the pathological thickening of fluids.

Phlegm is a secondary pathogen. It is usually the result of one of four underlying causes:

1. **Spleen Deficiency** leads to fluid stasis and dampness, which can transform into phlegm
2. **Heat** thickens and congeals the normal fluids into phlegm
3. **Kidney Deficiency** leads to a disruption of normal fluid metabolism; the overflowing fluids congeal into phlegm
4. **Liver Qi Stagnation** slows the circulation of fluids in the body causing them to congeal into phlegm

“The Spleen is the source of phlegm; the Lung is the house of phlegm.”

Phlegm can be **substantial** or **insubstantial**.

Substantial phlegm is real and visible, such as with cough and congestion.

Insustantial phlegm cannot be seen. For example, insubstantial phlegm blocking the Heart orifices can cause shen problems. When insubstantial phlegm creates blockage in the channels, there may be phlegm-nodules such as lipomas, goiter, scrofula, plum pit qi, etc.

Herbs that Transform Phlegm and Stop Cough

- **HERBS THAT COOL AND TRANSFORM PHEGGM-HEAT** clear heat and eliminate phlegm, for cough with **thick, yellow, sticky, difficult-to-expectorate sputum**. They can also treat nodules (such as goiter and scrofula), and convulsions and seizures due to phlegm. These herbs tend to be **cold** and **bitter**, while some of them are sweet because they moisten the Lung to make phlegm thinner and easier to expectorate. Since heat tends to damage yin fluids, these herbs are often combined with herbs that tonify yin.
- **HERBS THAT WARM AND TRANSFORM COLD PHEGGM** warm the Lung and transform phlegm, for **thin, copious, white or clear phlegm**. These herbs are often combined with herbs that tonify the Spleen, warm the interior, or dry dampness.
- **HERBS THAT STOP COUGH AND WHEEZING** redirect rebellious qi downward to relieve cough and wheezing. They ventilate the Lung, but they don't necessarily have a direct action of transforming phlegm.

Herbs that Transform Phlegm and Stop Cough

COOL AND TRANSFORM PHEGGM-HEAT

- qián hú
- chuān bèi mǔ
- zhè bèi mǔ
- guā lóu
- zhú rú
- hǎi zǎo / kūn bù

WARM AND TRANSFORM COLD PHEGGM

- zhì bàn xià
- zhì tiān nán xīng
- bái jiè zǐ
- jié gěng
- xuán fù huā
- bái qián

STOP COUGH AND WHEEZING

- xìng rén
- zǐ wǎn
- kuǎn dōng huā
- zǐ sū zǐ
- pí pa yè
- bǎi bù
- sāng bái pí

HERBS THAT COOL AND TRANSFORM PHEGM-HEAT

Herbs that Cool and Transform Phlegm-Heat

Phlegm-heat is thick, yellow, scanty, and may contain blood.

Dry-phlegm is a type of phlegm-heat that is chunky.

- **Phlegm in the Lung:** Cough, wheezing, stifling sensation in chest, pain in ribs
- **Phlegm in Stomach:** Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, epigastric distention
- **Phlegm in Channels:** Nodules, goiter, scrofula

Herbs in this category tend to be cold and bitter. Use caution with cold patterns or Spleen deficiency. Some of these herbs are drying and should not be used for cough due to yin deficiency.



18 Incompatible herbs:

- **Fu Zi** is incompatible with **Bei Mu**, **Zhi Ban Xia**, Bai Ji, **Gua Lou**, and Bai Lian
- **Gan Cao** is incompatible with Da Ji, Gan Sui, **Hai Zao**, Yuan Hua

Herbs that Cool and Transform Phlegm-Heat

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Taste: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• bitter |
| Temperature: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• cold |
| Channels: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LU, SP |
| Main Action: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resolve phlegm-heat |
| Other: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• These herbs also treat scrofula, goiter, and convulsions caused by phlegm-heat• Some of these herbs are sweet because they moisten the Lung and make phlegm thinner and easier to expectorate• Since phlegm-heat often damages the yin fluids, these herbs are commonly combined with herbs that tonify yin |

Herbs that Cool and Transform Phlegm-Heat

- qián hú
- chuān bèi mǔ
- zhè bèi mǔ
- guā lóu
- zhú rú
- hǎi zǎo / kūn bù
- jié gěng

qián hú

peucedani radix

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: bitter, acrid
Channels: LU
Dosage: 3-9 grams

前
胡

1. transforms phlegm-heat

- mild
- esp. for thick phlegm in the Lung

2. expels wind-heat invasion



chuān bèi mǔ

fritillariae cirrhosae bulbus

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: bitter, sweet
Channels: HT, LU
Dosage: 3-9 grams

川
贝
母

1. transforms phlegm-heat

- moistens Lung yin; esp. for cough due to yin deficiency
- directs Heart fire downward; for stifling sensation and chest bi

2. dissipates nodules

- for nodules due to phlegm-fire, e.g. nodules, sores, swellings, scrofula, breast abscess



Chuan Bei Mu and Zhe Bai Mu are paired herbs

Chuan Bei Mu can be powdered and sprinkled over steamed asian pear as a home remedy for stopping cough.

zhè bèi mǔ

fritillariae thunbergii bulbus

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter
Channels: HT, LU
Dosage: 3-9 grams

1. transforms phlegm-heat
 - for cough due to Lung heat
2. dissipates nodules
 - esp. for nodules in the neck
 - scrofula, goiter, Lung abscess, breast abscess

Zhe Bei Mu is colder than Chuan Bei Mu.
Chuan Bei Mu is sweet and moistening. Zhe Bei Mu is not sweet and does not moisten.
Zhe Bei Mu is better at treating nod(zh)ules



浙
贝
母

guā lóu

tricosanthis fructus

Temp: cold
Taste: sweet
Channels: LI, LU, ST
Dosage: 9-21 grams

1. clears Lung heat to transform phlegm
 - makes phlegm thinner and easier to expectorate
 - Gua Lou Pi is best for this
2. opens the chest to treat chest bi
 - for stifling sensation, chest pain, chest pressure
 - Quan Gua Lou is best for this
3. moistens Large Intestine to relieve constipation
 - Gua Lou Ren is best for this

Quan Gua Lou/Gua Lou Shi - entire fruit (9-21g)
Gua Lou Pi - peel (6-12g)
Gua Lou Ren - seed (9-15g)



栝
楼

zhú rú

bambusae caulis in taeniam

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: sweet
Channels: LU, ST, GB
Dosage: 4.5-9 grams

竹
茹

1. transforms phlegm-heat

- esp. for phlegm due to Gallbladder and Stomach heat
- for acute sinusitis (bi yuan)

2. clears Stomach heat and stops vomiting

- for nausea, vomiting, morning sickness due to heat



Phlegm due to Gallbladder and Stomach heat is copious rather than scanty. It also causes shen problems such as insomnia, palpitation, irritability; or poor focus, poor concentration, and poor memory.

hǎi zǎo / kūn bù

sargassum / eckloniae thallus

Temp: cold
Taste: bitter, salty / salty
Channels: LU, ST, KI
Dosage: 6-15 grams

海
藻

1. reduces phlegm and softens hardness

- for insubstantial phlegm only
- for phlegm nodules such as goiter, scrofula
- for bulging (shan) disorders involving the scrotum and testicles

2. promotes urination to treat edema



Hai Zao and Kun Bu are seaweeds. They are salty.
Hai Zao is incompatible with Gan Cao.

jié gěng

platycodi radix

Temp: neutral (slightly cold)
Taste: bitter, acrid
Channels: LU
Dosage: 3–9 grams

1. disseminates Lung qi and transforms phlegm

- for cough with phlegm due to heat or cold
- vents Lung qi to stop cough
- benefits throat; for throat pain or loss of voice

2. discharges pus

- for Lung abscess or throat abscess (use internally)

Jie Geng is a Lung channel guiding herb. It can direct the actions of other herbs to the upper body. Bensky puts this herb in the next category, *Warm Herbs that Transform Cold-Phlegm*



桔
梗

pàng dà hǎi

sterculiae lynchnophorae semen

Temp: cold
Taste: sweet
Channels: LI, LU
Dosage: 2-3 pieces

1. clears and disseminate Lung qi

- for sore throat, hoarseness, and cough due to phlegm-heat
- used alone as tea

2. moistens Large Intestine

3. vents rashes

- used externally

胖
大
海

Summary

qian hu

peucedani radix

transforms phlegm-heat

- expels wind-heat

chuan bei mu

fritillariae cirrhosae bulbus

transforms phlegm-heat

- moistens LU (sweet)

zhe bei mu

fritillariae thunbergii bulbus

transforms phlegm-heat

- stops cough

- dissipates nodules

gua lou

tricosanthis fructus

transforms phlegm-heat

- makes phlegm thinner and easier to expectorate

- opens chest
- moistens LI (Gua Lou Ren)

zhu ru

bambusae caulis in taeniam

transforms phlegm-heat

- for ST/GB phlegm

- rebellious ST qi due to heat

hai zao/kun bu

sargassum / eckloniae thallus

transforms insubstantial phlegm

- for nodules, goiter, scrofula