

## Adverse Reactions of Chinese Medicines

Is it true that Chinese herbal medicines do not have side effects because they are of natural origin?

As a matter of fact, improper use of Chinese medicines may lead to adverse reactions. The main causes are set out below:



Department of Health

### 6. Other reasons

- The chemical ingredients of Chinese medicines are very complicated. Due to the differences in each individual's body constitution, the ingredients of some Chinese medicines may lead to allergic reactions.



- Some Chinese herbs when used together will result in toxic effects. It is known as prescription contraindication.

- Some Chinese herbs may have untoward influences on pregnant women or fetuses.



**Please consult Chinese medicine practitioners and follow their advice before taking Chinese medicines! Don't prescribe Chinese medicines by yourself!**

Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office  
Department of Health  
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### 4. Mismatch of herbs to bodily state

- Use of Chinese medicines should match one's body constitution and clinical condition in order to achieve therapeutic results. If the medicines are not match for the bodily state, it can be harmful instead.



### 5. Over-consumption or prolonged use

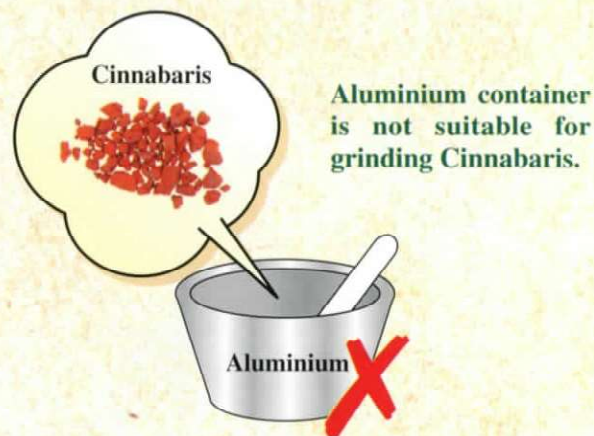
- Use of Chinese medicines should be in accordance with medical advice and be stopped upon cure. Correct dosage is also very important. Overdose or taking the medicines for too long may lead to adverse reactions caused by the accumulation of toxic ingredients of some Chinese medicines in the body.



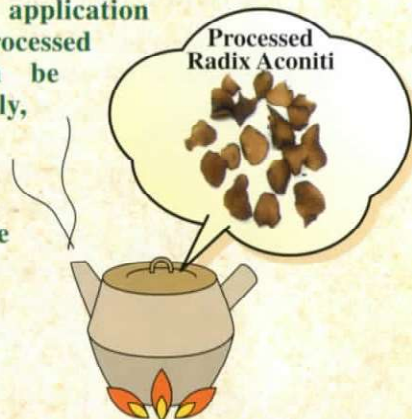


### 3. Improper decoction

- Chinese medicines should be decocted properly to exert their effects and minimize the toxicity and side-effects of particular herbs. Therefore, please comply with the methods of decoction and administration as instructed by Chinese medicine practitioners to avoid adverse reactions caused by improper decoction.

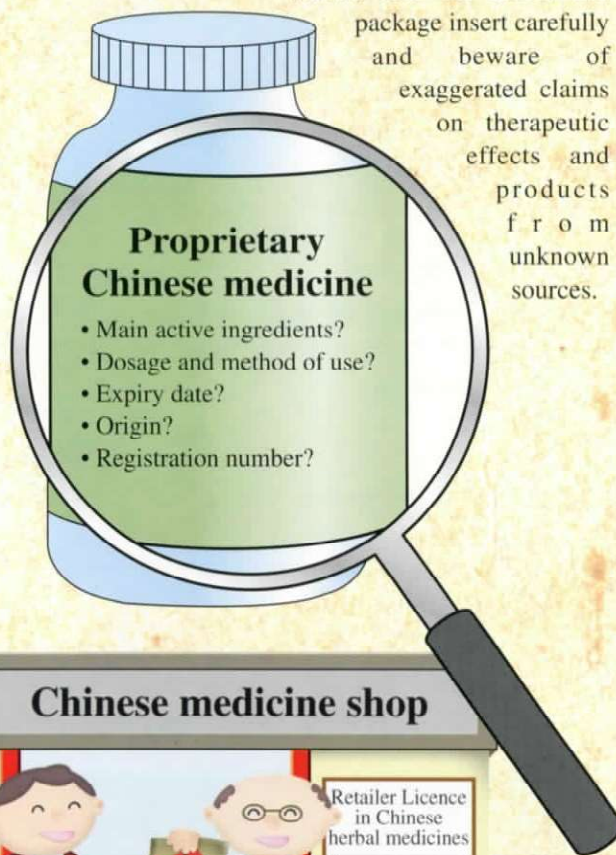


Unprocessed Radix Aconiti, Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Radix Aconiti Lateralis, etc. are for external application only. Their processed products can be taken internally, but it should be decocted first and for a long time before consumption.



### 2. Quality defect

- Usage of Chinese medicine with quality defect such as adulteration of western medicines or other impurities may lead to adverse reactions. People should read the labels and package insert carefully and beware of exaggerated claims on therapeutic effects and products from unknown sources.



Purchase Chinese medicines from licensed Chinese medicine shops

### 1. Erroneous Substitution

- It is not uncommon for different Chinese herbal medicines to share the same name and one Chinese herbal medicine has different names. Sometimes, different herbs look similar to each other. Adverse reactions may be resulted when the herb is confused with another.

Different Chinese herbal medicines with the same name should not substitute each other.



Aristolochiaceae  
**Radix Aristolochiae Fangchi**  
(Prohibition of sale in Hong Kong since 1 June 2004)



Menispermaceae  
**Radix Stephaniae Tetrandrae**  
Chinese herbal medicine listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance\*

Herbs with similar physical appearance should be differentiated carefully.



Solanaceae  
**Flos Daturae Metelis**  
Chinese herbal medicine listed in Schedule 1 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance\*



Bignoniaceae  
**Flos Campsis**  
Chinese herbal medicine listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance\*

\* 31 toxic Chinese herbal medicines listed in Schedule 1 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, purchase of the medicine must be in accordance with a prescription from a registered Chinese medicine practitioner. Another 574 commonly used Chinese herbal medicines in Hong Kong are listed in Schedule 2.