

Traditional Chinese medicine could boost cancer treatment

An ancient 1,800 year old Chinese herbal remedy may boost the effects of cancer treatment as well as reduce its side-effects, new research suggests.

By [Richard Alleyne](#), Science Correspondent
Published: 7:00PM BST 18 Aug 2010

Known as Huang Qin Tang, the mix of plant extracts, roots and fruit has been used for hundreds of years to treat stomach upsets and nausea.

But now researchers have found that it not only does the same for patients on chemotherapy, it also increases the effectiveness of the treatment.



The formula used in the experiment consists of four herbs- extract of peonies, a pretty purple flower called skullcap, together with liquorice and fruit from a buckthorn tree Photo: AP

Related Articles

[NHS to promote acupuncture for back pain](#)

[Health Q&A: shingles](#)

[Hindu guru claims homosexuality can be 'cured' by yoga](#)

[Manhunt for mother after she refuses cancer treatment for son](#)

[How to beat hay fever](#)

[Health advice: 'How can I stop my hair thinning?'](#)

The strong drugs used in chemotherapy cause a number of toxic side effects because it kills healthy cells as well as cancerous ones.

This is particularly true in the digestive tract or intestines.

The team from Yale University found that in mice the use of the Huang Qin Tang mixture helped protect the intestine lining and helped it recover more quickly.

It also reduced inflammation and boosted the effectiveness of the chemotherapy to kill tumours.

The formula used in the experiment consists of four herbs – extract of peonies, a pretty purple flower called skullcap, together with liquorice and fruit from a buckthorn tree.

The researchers treated mice with colon and rectal cancer with chemotherapy, which shrank tumours but also caused massive destruction in the intestinal lining of the animals.

After a few days of treatment with PHY906, the medicine restored the damaged intestinal linings in the mice.

The patients lost less weight and saw more cancer cells killed.

"Chemotherapy causes great distress for millions of patients, but PHY-906 has multiple biologically active compounds which can act on multiple sources of discomfort," said Professor Yung-Chi Cheng, lead author of the study published in Science Translational Medicine.

"This combination of chemotherapy and herbs represents a marriage of Western and Eastern approaches to the treatment of cancer.

"We will continue to refine these processes to better study and understand the sophisticated nature of herbal medicines. Revisiting history may lead us to discovering future medicines."

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2010