Huang Lian Formula Family
With Dr Huang Huang

**Huang Lian**
- One of the most bitter Chinese herbs
- Included in 12 formulas in the Shang Han Lun and 7 formulas in the Jin Gui Yao Lue.

**Huang Lian Herb Pattern**
- Vexation and restlessness, or palpitations, or insomnia, or mental confusion
- Glomus under the heart, abdominal pain, heat type diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting or digestive type symptoms
- Huang Lian tongue - red or dark red tongue colour, tongue coating is greasy yellow, tongue surface is dry, tongue body is firm and stiff

**Huang Lian Tang**
- Traditionally used to treat vomiting due to complex diseases characterised by a mixture of heat and cold.
- Functions include clearing the above and warming below, harmonising the Stomach and descending rebellious Qi, hypoglycaemic, anti-arrhythmic, promotes gastric emptying, sedative, etc.
- Indicated for abdominal pain and vomiting
- Dr Huang’s modifications of the formula:
  - Huang Lian 5-15g
  - Rou Gui 10-15g
  - Dang Shen 15g or Ren Shen 10g
  - Ban Xia 15g
  - Gan Cao 5-15g
  - Gan Jiang 15g
  - Da Zao 20g
  
  Decoct herbs in 900ml of water and reduce water to 300ml.
  Divide into 2-5 portions to administer. Drink the formula warm.

- Applicable to patients with the following characteristics:
  - **Thin with dark yellow complexion** – with flat abdomen; thin abdominal muscles that lacks elasticity; pain or discomfort on abdominal palpation
  - **Dark coloured tongue and lips** – tongue can be dark and pale or dark red with white coating
Pain and vomiting – has obvious gastrointestinal symptoms, mainly vomiting and abdominal pain

Vexation and palpitations – often have anxiety, insomnia, palpitations, spontaneous sweating, etc.

- Applicable to conditions and diseases that present with:
  - Abdominal pain and diarrhoea e.g. chronic bacillary dysentery, intestinal tuberculosis, Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, intestinal bacteria dysbiosis, IBS, cholecystitis, functional diarrhoea, diabetes induced diarrhoea, drug induced diarrhoea
  - Vomiting due to gastrointestinal diseases e.g. acute gastroenteritis, food poisoning, alcohol intoxication, gastrointestinal irritation due to chemicals or drugs, acute gastric dilatation, pyloric stenosis, gastric retention, diabetes induced gastroparesis, reflux oesophagitis, gastric membrane prolapse syndrome, duodenal obstruction, etc.
  - Insomnia e.g. neurosis, premature ejaculation, erectile dysfunction, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, etc.
  - Palpitations e.g. myocarditis, arrhythmia, etc.

- Dr Huang’s clinical experience using this formula:
  - Diabetes:
    - Suitable for patients who are thin, have nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal distention and paraumbilical pain e.g. diabetes induced gastroparesis, diarrhoea, etc.
    - If the patient has diarrhoea, add Ge Gen 50g.
    - If the patient has hyperglycaemia, dry mouth and bitter taste in the mouth, increase the dose of Huang Lian.
    - Alternatively, use equal amounts of Huang Lian and Rou Gui, grind these into a powder and encapsulate the powder or make water pills out of the powder. Take 5g 2-3 times per day.
  - Gastroenteritis:
    - Suitable for gastroenteritis presenting with the main symptoms of vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain.
    - Suitable for patients who are thin, for those who have these symptoms after drinking alcohol or for those who have hyperglycaemia. Use the original formula and do not increase the dose of Huang Lian (3-5g).
  - Alcohol intoxication:
    - Suitable for alcohol induced vomiting, diarrhoea, dry mouth, dizziness, etc.
    - Can also consider this formula for conditions induced or exacerbated by alcohol.
  - Insomnia:
    - Suitable for insomnia that is accompanied by gastrointestinal symptoms.
    - The patient often describes the sleep as light and dreamful; they are easily awakened; they often have abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, vexation, palpitations, spontaneous sweating or sexual dysfunction.
    - Alternatively, pour boiling water onto equal amounts of Huang Lian and Rou Gui, and drink before bed.
  - Sexual dysfunction:
    - This formula can be used to enhance patients’ sexual functioning, including treating erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation.
- Suitable for patients with Heart & Kidney not communicating pattern, or patients with anxiety and insomnia.
- Common accompanying symptoms include lower abdomen cramps and pain, inhibited urination, etc.
- Increase the dose of Huang Lian for patients with a more rapid heart rate.

- **Common cold and fever:**
  - Suitable for patients with the common cold, fever that does not subside after sweating, or with diarrhoea, or palpitations.

**Additional Notes:**
- This formula pattern can also be thought of as a Gui Zhi constitution type who contracted a Huang Lian disease; or a heaty constitution type who contracted a Gui Zhi disease.
- For patients with severe abdominal distention or vomiting, give the formula in small doses frequently.
- The ratio between Huang Lian and Gui Zhi can be adjusted based on the following:
  - If the patient has no appetite and has dark coloured tongue body and a slow pulse, the Gui Zhi dosage should be greater than the Huang Lian dosage.
  - If the patient has a lot of vexation and a slippery pulse, the Huang Lian dosage should be greater than the Gui Zhi dosage.

- **Comparison with Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang:**
  - Both formulas can treat diseases of the gastrointestinal tract.
  - Abdominal pain and diarrhoea (often with borborygmus) are the key symptoms for Huang Lian Tang. Huang Lian Tang contains Gui Zhi and no Huang Qin, and hence the indicated patient type for this formula has dark or pale lips and tongue.
  - Glomus under the heart is the key symptom for Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang. Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang contains Huang Qin but no Gui Zhi, and hence the indicated patient type often has some internal heat, and therefore also has red lips and tongue.

**Huang Lian E Jiao Tang**
- Traditionally used to treat vexation and stop bleeding.
- Functions include nourishes Yin, clears Heat and Fire, calms the foetus, anxiolytic, antibacterial, haemostatic, etc.
- Suitable for treating insomnia due to irritability/vexation, glomus under the heart, abdominal pain, red tongue, blood in the stools, dysfunctional uterine bleeding, etc.
- Dr Huang’s modifications of the formula:
  - Huang Lian 5-20g
  - Huang Qin 15g
  - Bai Shao 15g
  - E Jiao 15g
  - Egg Yolks x 2

Decoct first 3 herbs in 600ml of water and reduce water to 200ml.
Strain the decoction and melt in the E Jiao. Wait for it to cool a little then mix in the 2 egg yolks (can also be taken separately). Divide into 2-3 portions to administer. Drink the formula warm.

- Applicable to patients with the following characteristics:
  - **Red lips** – medium build, pale or flushed complexion, red or dark red lips that are dry and slightly swollen looking, red spirited eyes, clear thinking; usually seen in young female patients.
  - **Dark red tongue** – tongue is either dark red like fire or looks like a strawberry colour; tongue is also dry or has a cracked peeled tongue coating; the tongue body is hard; may be accompanied by oral aphthous ulcers or oral mucosal erosions.
  - **Rapid pulse** – can be slippery and rapid, or thin and rapid; accompanied by chest stuffiness, palpitations; some patients have obvious abdominal aortic pulsation.
  - **Vexation and insomnia** – sleep issues; vexation as night approaches which subsides in the daytime; irritability and inability to concentrate or memory decline.
  - **Bleeding or tendency to bleed** – easily gets bruises, nose bleeds, blood in the stools; for women, tendency to get midcycle bleeding or early periods with fresh red sticky blood or with clots.

- Applicable to conditions and diseases that present with:
  - **Vexation & insomnia** e.g. vexed insomnia, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, arrhythmias.
  - **Bleeding** e.g. threatened miscarriage, menorrhagia, dysfunctional uterine bleeding, dysentery, ulcerative colitis, thrombocytopenic purpura, etc.
  - **Skin disorders characterised by damaged skin barrier with redness and dryness** e.g. eczema, erythema, chapped skin, etc.
  - **Dry mouth** e.g. diabetes, oral aphthous ulcers, etc.

- Dr Huang’s clinical experience using this formula:
  - **Threatened miscarriage**:
    - Suitable for patients who have delicate white skin, red lips, insomnia, feels hot, and have rapid heart rate.
    - Herb dosages do not have to be high e.g. 3g of Huang Lian is sufficient.
    - Stop the formula once the “foetus is calmed”.
  - **Polycystic ovarian syndrome**:
    - Suitable for PCOS patients with Yin Deficiency with Deficiency Fire Blazing pattern with the following symptoms:
      - Prolonged bleeding during period or continued spotting after period
      - Often have oral aphthous ulcers
      - Abnormal blood glucose levels or a family history of diabetes
      - Normal build or tends towards a skinnier build
  - **Premature ovarian failure**:
    - Suitable for women with premature ovarian failure or amenorrhoea who tends to have a thin build and red lips.
    - Add Sheng Di Huang.
  - **Thrombocytopenic purpura**:
    - This pattern is more commonly seen in women.
    - Add Sheng Di Huang and Da Huang.
  - **Blood in the stools**:
Patients may look anaemic, but bleeding is red; patients will also have vexation and insomnia, and also a slippery rapid pulse.

- e.g. bleeding haemorrhoids, bleeding from radiation enteritis, Crohn’s disease, bacillary dysentery, etc.

**Insomnia:**

- Suitable for patients with severe insomnia with heat signs – difficulty falling asleep, increasing vexation as the night progresses that is alleviated in the day; anxious, inability to focus, declining memory, palpitations, irregular periods, etc.
- Increase the dosage of Huang Lian.

**Diabetes:**

- Suitable for patients that also have insomnia and bleeding tendencies.
- Use heavy dosage of Huang Lian > 10g
- If the patient has a huge appetite, add Sheng Di Huang 30g.

**Skin disease:**

- Suitable for patients who also have concurrent insomnia.
- Skin is dry and red; skin lesions are less likely to be raised; flaky skin or dandruff; skin condition exacerbated by wind or sunlight
- E.g. dermatitis, eczema

**Other conditions:**

- Rapid atrial fibrillation, perimenopausal dry mouth, chronic prostatitis, oral aphthous ulcers, Sjogren’s syndrome, alopecia, etc.

**Additional Notes:**

- This formula can treat many different conditions. Its key signs and symptoms are insomnia, bleeding and mucosal erosions. These collection of signs and symptoms are known as Huang Lian E Jiao Tang Syndrome. The underlying cause of this syndrome is Yin Deficiency with Deficient Fire.
- This formula is not suitable for long term use. Once the symptoms have been alleviated, reduce the dosage or stop the formula.
- This formula is not suitable for menorrhagia secondary to uterine fibroids. Remove E Jiao or change the formula to Huang Lian Jie Du Tang or Xie Xin Tang.
- When using large doses of Huang Lian, mix in the egg yolk instead of taking the egg yolks separately to make the formula more palatable.

**Huang Lian Jie Du Tang**

- Traditionally used for treating heat diseases.
- Functions include heat clearing and fire purging.
- Suitable for patients presenting with conditions or signs and symptoms such as delirium, vexation, insomnia, palpitations, red tongue, dry mouth, rapid, slippery pulse, etc.
- Dr Huang’s modifications of the formula:
  
  Huang Lian 5-15g
  Huang Qin 10g
  Huang Bai 10g
  Zhi Zi 15g
Decoct herbs in 600ml of water and reduce water to 200ml.

Divide into 2 portions to administer. Drink the formula warm.

- Applicable to patients with the following characteristics:
  - **Red oily face** – fit build, flushed or dark red complexion, oily skin and scalp, red eyes, swollen painful dark red lips.
  - **Red or dark red tongue** – tongue body is hard and stiff; tongue coating is greasy yellow.
  - **Slippery, rapid pulse**
  - **Vexed, hot and dizzy** – prone to suffer from anxiety, depression, insomnia, dizziness, headache, declining memory, lack of focus, etc.
  - **Severe damp heat symptoms** – oily, smelly sweats; skin easily gets infected (e.g. boils, folliculitis, etc.); women tend to have yellow leucorrhoea; often have oral aphthous ulcers, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat, sticky eye discharge, etc.

- Applicable to conditions and diseases that present with:
  - **Acute infectious diseases & their related toxic encephalopathy**
  - **Vexation, headache, insomnìa** e.g. primary hypertension, cerebral haemorrhage, vascular dementia, subarachnoid haemorrhage, hyperfibrinogenaemia, blood hyperviscosity, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, etc.
  - **Infectious diseases** e.g. acute hepatitis, acute gastroenteritis, bacillary dysentery, etc.
  - **Suppurative skin diseases** e.g. folliculitis, eczema, dermatitis, impetigo, fungal infection, sexually transmitted disease, boils, erysipelas, acne, suppuratives arthritis, hand foot mouth disease, etc.
  - **Autoimmune diseases** e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, thrombocytopenic purpura, etc.
  - **Oral mucosal disorders** e.g. gingivitis, lichen planus, Behcet’s disease, etc.
  - **Bleeding disorders** e.g. haemophilia, thrombocytopenia, etc.
  - **Gynaecological inflammatory disorders** e.g. pelvic inflammatory diseases, dysmenorrhoea, menorrhagia, uterine fibroids, uterine adenomyosis, etc.

- Dr Huang’s clinical experience using this formula:
  - **Hypertension:**
    - Suitable for patients who have primary hypertension with normal cardiac and renal functions, accompanied by aversion to heat, sweating, rapid heart rate.
    - When the blood pressure is stabilised, the formula can be administered as a pill instead of a decoction.
  - **Brain disorders:**
    - E.g. sequelae of cerebrovascular disease, senile dementia, anxiety disorder, depressive disorders, etc.
  - **Diabetes:**
    - When used in Type 2 diabetes, its hypoglycaemic and anti-obesity effects are comparable to metformin.
  - **Oral mucosal erosions:**
    - This formula is often used for patients with lichen planus, recurrent mouth ulcers, Behcet’s disease, benign mucosal pemphigoid, localised mucosal erosions or pain, gingival bleeding, dry mouth, bitter taste in the mouth, bad breath, etc.
Formula modifications: Hunag Lian 5g, Huang Qin 10g, Huang Bai 10g, Zhi Zi 10g, Zhi Da Huang 10g, Sheng Gan Cao 20g

- **Haemorrhagic purpura:**
  - E.g. diffuse intravascular coagulation, thrombocytopenic purpura, haemophilia, etc.
  - Can combine with formulas such as Xie Xin Tang or Xi Jiao Di Huang Tang, etc.

- **Heavy menstrual bleeding:**
  - Suitable for heavy menstrual flow with deep red sticky menses and clots accompanied by lower back or abdominal pain, yellow dripping leucorrhoea, and perineal itching; also suitable for uterine fibroids and pelvic inflammatory diseases.
  - For heat type dysmenorrhoea, combine with Huang Qin Tang.

- **Eczema and dermatitis:**
  - E.g. localised redness, swelling, mucosal erosions, suppuration, lots of exudate
  - If very itchy, add Jing Jie, Fang Feng, Chai Hu, Gan Cao, etc. or Jing Jie Lian Qiao Tang.
  - If the skin colour is bright red, add Xi Jiao Di Huang Tang and Si Wu Tang.

- **Anorectal diseases:**
  - E.g. pilonidal sinus inflammation, haemorrhoids, etc.
  - Key symptoms are perianal pain, swelling, burning sensation or bleeding.

- **Heat type Bi syndrome:**
  - E.g. rheumatoid arthritis, suppurative arthritis, gouty arthritis, etc.
  - Affected joints are often red, swollen, painful, with morning stiffness.
  - For extreme pain, combine with Ma Huang Fu Zi Xi Xin Tang.
  - For aversion to cold or wind, add Xiao Chai Hu Tang.

- **Other conditions:**
  - Corticosteroid induced red face and obesity; excessive appetite; patients who are easily excited and irritable; heatiness due to inappropriate use of tonics

- **Additional Notes:**
  - Used on the type of body constitution or diseases that are the Damp Heat type in TCM. Most commonly seen in strong, young adults.
  - For acute diseases, focus on the disease and not the patient. For chronic diseases, focus on the patient and not the disease.
  - This formula is contraindicated in patients who are anaemic, have poor appetite, who are emaciated, whose liver or renal functions are suboptimal.
  - Misuse or overuse of this formula can cause dark circles under the eyes, a darkening of the facial complexion, poor appetite and diarrhoea.

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**Xiao Xian Xiong Tang**

- Traditionally use to treat Jie Xiong (chest bind).
- Functions include heat clearing, phlegm resolving, bowel purging effects.
- Suitable to use in conditions whereby there is chest or abdominal pain, sticky yellow phlegm and constipation.
- Dr Huang’s modifications of the formula:
Huang Lian 5g
Jiang Ban Xia 15g
Quan Gua Lou 40g

Decoct herbs in 600ml of water and reduce water to 300ml.
Divide into 2-3 portions to administer. Drink the formula warm.

- Applicable to patients with the following characteristics:
  - Red oily face, red tongue, greasy yellow tongue coating, superficial and slippery pulse or flooding pulse.
  - Chest stuffiness or chest pain; cough with sticky yellow phlegm.
  - Poor appetite and constipation.
  - Resistance or pain when the patient’s epigastrium or region below the sternum is pressed.
  - Vexation, dizziness or insomnia.
- Applicable to conditions and diseases that present with:
  - Chest stuffiness, cough and thick yellow phlegm e.g. common cold, pleurisy, pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, atelectasis, spontaneous pneumothorax, sinusitis, breast diseases, etc.
  - Epigastric pain and constipation e.g. cholecystitis, pancreatitis, biliary reflux, acute gastritis, pyloric stenosis, acute oesophagitis, reflux oesophagitis, etc.
  - Dizziness and headache e.g. hypertension, coronary heart disease, diabetes, vertigo, etc.
- Dr Huang’s clinical experience using this formula:
  - Pulmonary infections:
    - E.g. bronchitis, asthma, atelectasis, pleurisy, empyema, spontaneous pneumothorax, etc.
    - Suitable for patients who have symptoms of chest stuffiness, sticky yellow phlegm and constipation.
    - Can be used in combination with Da Chai Hu Tang, Xiao Chai Hu Tang and Ma Xing Shi Gan Tang.
  - Reflux oesophagitis:
    - Patients usually presents with heart burn, reflux or chest pain.
    - If the patient’s build tends towards being overweight, has resistance on abdominal palpation, or has hypertension, or history of biliary disease, add Da Chai Hu Tang.
  - Hypertension and coronary heart disease:
    - Patients usually have red oily face, chest stuffiness or pain, constipation, cough with copious phlegm.
    - Can combine this formula with Wen Dan Tang or Da Chai Hu Tang.
  - Diabetes:
    - Can substitute Gua Lou with Tian Hua Fen, add Zhi Mu.
  - Galactostasis leading to mastitis:
    - Causes pain and swelling of the breast, and reduction in breast milk.
    - If accompanied by abdominal pain, constipation, thick yellow tongue coating, strong pulse, add Da Huang and Zhi Ke.
- Additional Notes:
This formula’s key symptoms are chest pain and cough up yellow phlegm (most commonly seen in respiratory tract infections).

Commonly used formulas in combination with this formula:
- If accompanied by a bitter taste in the mouth, alternating sensation of hot and cold, combine with Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Chai Xian Tang).
- If accompanied by cough and wheeze, combine with Ma Xing Shì Gan Tang or San Ao Tang.
- If accompanied by chest stuffiness and angina, combine with Si Ni San, and add Xie Bai 15g and Chuan Xiong 15g.
- If accompanied by nausea and vomiting, add Zhu Ru 10g, Sheng Jiang 15g.
- If the phlegm is extremely sticky or hard, add Jie Geng 15g.

Some patients will have diarrhoea after this formula but their main symptoms will be alleviated.

Comparison to Da Chai Hu Tang:
- Both have symptoms of pain under the heart, nausea and vomiting, and constipation.
- Da Chai Hu Tang pattern has obvious abdominal distention and pain and fullness under the heart.
- Xiao Xian Xiong Tang’s key symptom is chest stuffiness; the pain under the heart is only upon pressing.
- The symptoms of Da Chai Hu Tang are more due to gastrointestinal reflux whereas the symptoms of Xiao Xian Xiong Tang are more due to respiratory tract infection.

Comparison to Huang Lian Tang:
- Both formulas can treat abdominal pain.
- The abdominal pain in Xiao Xian Xiong Tang is just under heart (epigastrium) and in the chest. Pain is only upon pressing.
- The abdominal pain for Huang Lian Tang is around and below the umbilical area.

Comparison to Bai Hu Tang:
- Both have superficial and slippery pulses.
- The Xiao Xian Xiong Tang pattern is due to phlegm heat obstructing the chest and has constipation and thick and greasy tongue coating.
- The Bai Hu Tang pattern is due to heat and Qi obstructing and gathering in the San Jiao, and has copious sweating.