

HEALTH

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TCM: Hangover help

Ge-gen, the dried root of the Kudzu plant, is widely used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and modern herbal products. One of the "50 fundamental herbs" of TCM, it has remarkable therapeutic powers.

Also called *radix puerariae*, Ge-gen is a perennial vine common in the shaded areas of mountains, fields, thickets and forests throughout China. It's collected in autumn and winter, and often cut into thick slices when fresh, then dried. According to TCM, the active ingredients in the herb act on the spleen and stomach meridians. Sweet, cool and pungent, it can dispel pathogens from muscles and relieve pain. It's an excellent

remedy for headaches, fever, stiffness and soreness in the neck and shoulders. If a patient is suffering from internal heat and fluid deficiencies, Ge-gen can have a dual impact, simultaneously reducing the heat and generating body fluids.

Prescriptions usually include combinations of other herbs, such as ephedra, cassia twig, white peony root and licorice root.

One of its traditional usages is preventing or treating alcohol problems. For centuries, Chinese imbibers have fortified themselves before a spree by drinking a

concentrated Ge-gen solution to prevent drunkenness, or to at least reduce the severity of hangovers. In 1993, a

team of scientists at Harvard University studied a chemical extract from Ge-gen called daidzin for its potential to treat alcoholism and reduce the effects of hangovers. The study, conducted by biochemist Wing-Ming Keung used hamsters, an animal known to have a fondness for alcohol. After getting the animals addicted to alcohol then making it readily available, the Ge-gen based medications appeared to dramatically suppress their cravings. Ge-gen may ultimately provide safe, effective therapeutic agents for alcohol abuse, but this has yet to be proven in controlled human studies.

Other health conditions that can be treated by this herb include measles, diarrhoea, vomiting, dizziness, ringing in the ears, diabetic symptoms, sweating problems, and urinary tract and fungal infections. Ge-gen has also been used successfully in clinical conditions to treat hypertension. In one study, 222 patients with hypertension and associated neck stiffness and pain were treated with Ge-gen. More than 78 per cent reported an improvement in their conditions.

Another similar plant called Fenge has been consumed as a food throughout Southeast Asia for centuries. The Cantonese boil Fenge with pork meat or pork bones in combination with rice, beans and red dates. The recipe is simple. First, lean pork or pork bones are scalded in boiling water, and then 10 cups of water are poured into a pot and brought to the boil. The ingredients are then added and boiled once again. The brew is left to simmer for two hours.

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**Before taking any medicine, consult your
TCM or medical practitioner**