

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Wine on

Alcohol is a common ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine, having been used for more than 4,000 years.

Alcoholic drinks with medicinal purposes in TCM include millet wine, strong white spirits and medicated wines and beers. Li Shizhen, a famous TCM practitioner, talked about wine in his book *Bencao Gangmu*. "Wine is pure yang in nature, and pungent and sweet in flavour,"

he wrote. "It has the effects of invigorating vital function and dispersing pathogens. Wine is dry and hot in property, and thus can be used to expel dampness and cold."

Modern TCM uses wine to enhance the potency of certain drugs, enliven organ functions, give lustre to the skin, expel wind and cold pathogens and activate blood circulation.

Clinically, wine is effective for unblocking cold-dampness obstruction in the meridians (the pathways where *chi* flows) caused by such conditions as arthritis, chest pain, abdominal pain and back pain.

It's a Chinese tradition to prepare herbal wines for patients recovering from illness or chronic conditions. For example, black-bone chicken wine is made for complications after stroke, epimedium wines for impotence and infertility and Solomon seal rhizome (*huang jing*) for combating the effects of ageing.

It's recommended to take them in small amounts on a regular basis. Alternatively, herbal tinctures can be made with wine for external rubbing.

From a TCM perspective, drinking a proper amount of alcohol is beneficial for health. It's thought to improve circulation, invigorate mental activity and promote warmth and relaxation.

However, overconsumption induces damp-heat production and impairs the digestive system.

When damp heat attacks the lungs, it causes coughing and excess secretions in the throat. For people who overconsume alcohol on a long-term basis, there may also be vomiting, diarrhoea, bloody stools, poor appetite and urinary problems. According to TCM, this is due to a build up of alcoholic toxins, which damage the spirit, impair the spleen and exhaust the blood and essence (an essential substance used to support life).

TCM strategies to eliminate alcohol toxins include promoting *chi* flow, resuming normal spleen function and clearing the liver. Commonly used herbs

include American ginseng, flower of kudzu vine, tangerine peel, chrysanthemum, raisin tree seeds (*zhijuzi*) and bamboo shavings.

If someone regularly drinks alcohol, these ingredients can be made into a tea, usually available in traditional herbal teashops.

A popular prescription – *ge hua jie cheng tang* – that contains kudzu vine flower and ginseng as the main active ingredients, is for those suffering from hangovers. It's said to promote urination, invigorate the spleen and stomach, and relieve nausea, headaches and abdominal discomfort.

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