The Clinical Uses of Dahuang (Rheum officinale)

Dahuang (大黄, Rheum officinale) has been used commonly in the practice of TCM for thousands of years. Conventionally, it has always been one of the four drugs most integral to Chinese medicine, along with ginseng, cooked rehmannia and aconite. The drug has a kind of laxative effect, thoroughly cleansing the bowels without preventing the absorption of nutrients to the body. For added effect, dahuang is often complemented by mirabilium, magnolia bark and unripe bitter orange, and can be used for the treatment of abdominal swelling, fever, and constipation.

Modern pharmacological research indicates that dahuang contains chrysophanol anthraquinone derivatives, which are highly capable of inhibiting the synthesis of nucleic acid and protein in bacteria. These lend the drug a strong anti-bacterial effect, particularly against staphylococcus, aureus and streptococcus, hence the Chinese concept that it serves as a body 'cleanser.' Among the middle-aged and the elderly, the taking of dahuang periodically can help to clear body waste and regulate the vital forces and blood circulation, activating the channels and collaterals, and resulting in the long-term benefit of preventing diseases and promoting longevity.

Recently, dahuang has been the subject of numerous R&D projects. In Italy, it is used as an ingredient in a health drink, while in Switzerland, it is used in cakes and sweets that are marketed as healthcare products. The medical community has proposed the establishment of a 'dahuang day,' and a center for research into the drug is soon to be set up.

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Health Benefits of the Crataegus Fruit

The crataegus fruit, also known as shanzha (山楂), may bloom, and hawthorn, is a deciduous arbor of the Rosaceae family. In China, this rare plant has been used for medicinal and healthcare purposes for the past 300 years. Chemical analysis has shown that the fruit contains 22% sugars, 0.7% proteins and 0.2% fat. It also contains vitamins and minerals, with larger proportions of calcium and vitamin C than can be found in apples, peas or oranges. In addition, it is high in triterpenes, flavones and amygdalin.

According to the traditional Chinese view, the crataegus fruit is both sweet and sour, and slightly warm in nature. Both the fresh and the dried varieties are able to dissipate stasis; aid digestion; reduce phlegm; neutralize venom; aid in blood coagulation and enhance appetite. In Chinese clinics, it is used in the treatment of indigestion caused by consumption of meat, stomach pains, gonorrhea, discomfort during menstruation, high blood lipid levels, etc.

Chinese medicine sees tumors as being accumulations formed by the trapping of air and blood to certain parts of the body, inducing phlegm and trapped air between the internal organs and the sinews and vessels. The crataegus fruit can dissipate these accumulations, helping to increase blood circulation and effectively curing the tumor. More modern research conducted on the fruit has indicated that it is capable of enhancing the immune ability of the human body, inhibiting the tumor-inducing effect of aflatoxin in the liver and eliminating the actions of nitrites.