

Fall and Strike, Tieh ta Herbal Medicine

Many people tend to think of all pain as the same. When you are hurt, pain is often the most important symptom you want to address. When you want the most effective treatment, it helps to identify the type of pain you are dealing with.

I came into herbal medicine from the world of martial arts training. Healing and martial arts training have traditionally been associated for the very practical reason that people get hurt when they are training. Martial arts medicine is generally referred to as "Tieh Ta" medicine, or literally "fall and strike" medicine. The herbal formulas designed to treat pain and heal broken tissue still have a place in our modern society. Understanding the nature of pain can help you choose the medicine that will help you heal faster.

Many of the traditional tieh ta treatments came in the form of topical salves, plasters and liniments that would be applied to the injured area. Variations of these ancient formulas still exist on store shelves. Muscle rubs and liniments often contain some of the same herbs or herb extracts from these ancient formulas. The best formula should be determined by the type of pain you are experiencing.

In traditional herbal medicine, pain is classified as a lack of movement of energy. Pain can be broadly classified in one of four combinations: hot excess; hot deficient; cold excess; and cold deficient. These descriptions are defined in this way:

Hot pain – (usually a recent injury). Tissue is red or swollen, or feels warmer to the touch than surrounding tissue. The application of heat makes the injured area feel worse, and it feels better when rested.

Cold pain – (usually an old injury recently re-injured) There is no change in skin color, the pain feels better with the application of heat, and it feels better when area is in use.

Excess pain – (usually a new injury) Pain is sharp and becomes more intense with movement, or the area is painful to the touch.

Deficient pain – (usually an old or re-occurring injury) This is a dull ache type pain that can be intense, but generally not sharp except under certain movements. Pressing on the area or tight bandaging makes the pain lessen.

Example: If you have an old injury, a sore knee for instance, the pain may be a dull annoyance and can become worse when you do certain things. For this scenario, ice does not feel good, although it dulls the pain while the cold is applied. Despite the pain, you can continue your activities at a lower level than you would like. This is a deficient cold pain. The best treatment would be to use a liniment or sports rub regularly that contains warming herbs, as well as herbs that move energy through the area and heal tissue. Applied heat to the area would also help.

Most herbs used in tieh ta formulas have some moving quality. Excess conditions are best treated with rest, as well as stronger, faster moving herbs and strong aromatics to break up the pain.

Deficiency conditions call for milder moving herbs with a greater emphasis on tissue repair. This is because the pain exists due to a lack of tissue repair after the initial injury. Moderate use of the injured area is also recommended.

Cold pains should receive hot herb treatments (heat should also be applied regularly, be cautious when applying heat directly to a herbal plaster or treated area, as it can cause irritation) and hot pains should receive cold herb treatments. Open, non-healing wounds, cuts or abrasions should receive formulas that have an antiseptic quality, as well as herbs that stop bleeding and heal tissue. Not all formulas can be used on an open wound. Make sure you read the precautions on the package before you apply any medicine to an open wound.

Commercial products often are broad in application. They tend to just focus on the moving quality of herbs. Sometimes hot and

cold herbs are mixed together. Reading the label can help you determine what is the function of a particular formula. Most pain formulas are interchangeable as they all follow a basic format of ingredients mixed in a application carrier. Salves have an oil, wax or grease/butter base; liniments and antiseptics use water, alcohol, or oil; and plasters use a mix of sticky herbs or other carriers on a cloth. Herbs or chemical extracts are listed in decreasing amounts. Generally the important or largest percentage items are listed first, with modifier herbs listed later. This is not the best way to evaluate the function of the various ingredients, but can be used as a rough guide. It is not uncommon (and often appropriate) to mix hot and cold herbs in the same formula, usually with one predominant type. The question is which type of herbs are listed first as the main herbs, and which are the modifiers. Many traditional formulas also contain what are called wind dispelling herbs. These modifier herbs "treat wind" and tend to help the body to heal by protecting the sight of the injury from the environment.

The best thing to do is consult a certified herbalist (check NCCAOM.org) who can advise you on what products are best for the types of injuries you tend to encounter. Many certified herbalists can custom formulate topical and oral formulas specifically for you. Below is a list of common ingredients that you find in over-the-counter tieh ta formulas and sports rubs. This is just a quick overview to help you understand the formulas. Knowing the ingredients will help you understand what product is best for your type of pain.

Common Tieh Ta Herbs

Herb name	Function	Notes/cautions
an ye (eucalyptus)	cool, heals tissue	
aconite (fu zi, wu tou, chuan wu, cao wu)	hot	toxic when raw; caution with oral use
aloe vera (lu hui)	cold, heals tissue	carrier
angelica sinensis (dang gui, tang kwei)	nourishes, warm, heals tissue	
arnica	warm, heals tissue, stops bleeding	toxic; caution with oral use
asarum (wild ginger, xi xin)	hot	
bai shao (peony)	cool, moves, nourishes	
bai zhi (angelica dahurica)	warm, treats wind	
bo he (mint)	cold, aromatic	see menthol
borneol (bing pian)	aromatic, cool	
cajeput oil	moves	antiseptic, carrier
camphor (zhang nao)	aromatic, hot, strongly moves	toxic; caution with oral use
capsicum (chili, cayenne)	hot	
carthami tinctorii (hong hua, safflower)	warm, aromatic	
cassia oil (cinnamon oil)	warm	carrier
cassiae (cinnamon, rou gui, gui zhi)	hot	
catechu (betal husk, da fu pi)	stops bleeding	
cattail (pu huang)	moves	stops bleeding if charred
cayenne (capsicum)	hot	
chi shao (peony)	cold, moves	
chili pepper (capsicum)	hot	
chuan xiong (ligusticum, lovage root)	aromatic, warm, treats wind	
cinnamon root bark (gui zhi)	hot, moves	
cinnamon bark (rou gui)	hot	
clove (ding xiang)	aromatic, hot	
da huang (rhubarb)	strongly moves, cold	
dandelion (pu gong ying)	cold	
dang gui (angelica)	nourishes, warm, heals	

sinensis)	tissue	
ding xiang (clove)	aromatic, hot	
dragon bone (long gu, fossilized bone)	heals tissue	
dragon's blood herb (xue jie)	moves, heals tissue, stops bleeding	
drynaria (gu sui bu)	warm, heals tissue	
er cha (uncaria, catch)	stops bleeding	
eucalyptus (an ye)	cool, heals tissue	
fang feng (siler, lebebouriellae)	treats wind	
fennel (xiao hui xiang)	aromatic, warm	
frankincense (ru xiang)	heals tissue, warm, moves	
fu zi (aconite)	hot	toxic when raw; caution with oral use
gan cao (licorice root)	nourishes	harmonizes other herbs
ginger (sheng jiang, gan jiang)	hot	
gu sui bu (drynaria)	warm, heals tissue	
gui zhi (cinnamon root bark)	hot, moves	
gummi olibanum (frankincense ,ru xiang)	heals tissue, warm, moves	
honeysuckle (jin yin hua)	cold	
hong hua (safflower flower)	warm, aromatic	
hu zhang (polygonum cuspidatum)	cold	
huang qin (skullcap, scutellaria)	cold	
jiang huang, (zedoary rhizome, tumeric)	moves, cool	
jin yin hua (honeysuckle, lonicera)	cold	
lavender	cool	antiseptic
lebebouriellae (fang feng ,siler)	treats wind	
licorice (gan cao)	nourishes	harmonizes other herbs
ligusticum (chuan xiong)	aromatic, warm, treats wind	
liquid amber (lu lu tong)	moves	
long gu (fossilized bone,	heals tissue	

dragon bone)		
lu hui (aloe vera)	cold, heals tissue	carrier
lu lu tong (liquid amber herb)	moves	
menthol	aromatic, cold	extracted from mint
methyl salicylates (similar to aspirin)	moves	derived from tree bark
mo yao (myrrh)	heals tissue, moves	antiseptic
monkshood (aconite, fu zi)	hot	toxic when raw; caution with oral use
moschus (musk)	aromatic	
musk (she xiang)	aromatic	
myrrh (mo yao)	heals tissue, moves	antiseptic
panax notoginseng (san qi)	stops bleeding, moves, heals tissue, warm	
panax psuedoginseng (san qi)	stops bleeding, moves, heals tissue, warm	
peony root (chi shao, bai shao)	cold, moves	
peppermint (bo he)	aromatic, cold	
polygonum cuspidatum (hu zhang)	cold	
pu gong ying (dandelion)	cold	
pu huang (cattail herb)	moves	stops bleeding if charred
rhubarb, (rheum, rhei, da huang)	cold, strongly moves	
rose oil	moves	carrier
rou gui (cinnamon bark)	hot	
ru xiang (gummi olibanum, frankincense)	heals tissue, warm, moves	
safflower (hong hua)	warm, aromatic	
san qi (panax pseudoginseng root)	stops bleeding, moves, heals tissue, warm	
scutellaria (skullcap, huang qin)	cold	
she xiang (musk)	aromatic	
sheng jiang (ginger)	hot	
skullcap (huang qin)	cold	
taraxacum (dandelion, pu gong ying)	cold	
tea tree oil	cool	antiseptic, carrier
tien chi (san qi, pseudoginseng)	stops bleeding, moves, heals tissue, warm	

tumeric (zedoary rhizome,jiang huang)	moves, cool	
uncaria (er cha, cutch)	stops bleeding	
wintergreen	aromatic, cold	
xi xin (wild ginger root)	warm	
xiao hui xiang (fennel seeds, foeniculi)	aromatic, warm	
xue jie (dragon's blood herb)	moves, heals tissue, stops bleeding	
zedoary rhizome (tumeric, jiang huang)	moves, cool	
zhang nao (camphor)	aromatic, hot, strongly moves	toxic; caution with oral use

Herbal Liniment Product Guide

This is a follow up product guide to the article “A Guide To Chinese Martial Arts Herbal Trauma Formulas“. Please consult that article for more specific information on herbal product dynamics and proper product use.

Product Name	Use	Note
ABC Plaster	O	Hot
Anti-Rheumatic Plaster (Tientsin Drug)	R	Aromatic
Axe brand oil	O	Warm
Bao Zhen Gao/ Shang Yao Plasters	O	Warm
Chili Plasters	O	Hot
		Best burn cream, heals tissue, can be applied to open wounds to reduce scarring, heals bleeding hemorrhoids.
Ching Wan Hung (Great Wall)	A	
Compound Prescribed Watermelon Frost (Guilin)	A	For non-healing or infected open wounds with redness and swelling
Die Da Wan Hua (Jingxiutang Pharm.)	T	Good on burns
Die-Da Analgesic Essence (China National)	T	
Dr. Bob’s Medicated oil (Blue Poppy)	O	Warm to neutral
Dr. Shir’s Liniment (Spring Wind brand)	J	
Dragon Fire Liniment (Oriental Herb Co.)	O	Hot
		For swelling and pain when there is no redness or heat
Dragon’s Blood Liniment (Blue Poppy)	T	
E Mei Shan Plasters	O	Warm
Eagle oil	M	Strong pain reliever
Eighteen Budda Tit Da plaster	T	
Essential Balm	M	
		Long term use plaster for healing injuries
Fastt Patch (Wei Labs)	T	
Felursa Plaster For Bruise (Zhanjiang)	T	
Feng Liu Sing Tincture	T	Warm
Flower oil (Shanghai medicines)	O	Warm to neutral
Golden sunshine patches/spray cream	M	Cool
Green Willow liniment (Blue Poppy)	O	Hot
Hua To’s Eight Immortal’s Iron Palm (Oriental Herb Co.)	T	Designed for training as well as injury
Hua To’s Eight Immortals Dit Da Jow (Oriental herb Co.)	T	For post trauma healing
Hua Tuo Plasters (Kwang Chow United)	O	Warm
Huo Tuo Plasters (Jingxiutang Pharm.)	O	Warm
Imperial Pheonix (Oriental Herb Co.)	T	Training formula, hot
Iron Fist Liniment (Oriental Herb Co.)	T	Designed for training as well as injury
Iron Hand Liniment (East Earth)	T	Designed for training as well as injury
Jade Goddess (Oriental Herb Co.)	T	Training formula, tissue repair, cooling
Joseph’s Si Chi Pain relieving oil	M	

King Care Arthritis Pain Formula	O	Warm
King Care Original Formula	M	
King Care Sports Pain Formula	M	
Kou Pi Analgesic Plasters (Tientsin Drug)	O	Warm
Kou Pi Analgesic Plasters (Beijing Tung Jen Tang)	O	Warm
Kupico Plaster (Great Wall Brand)	R	Aromatic Warm to neutral, also indicated for itching
Kwan Loong	O	
Mao She Xiang San Xiong Dan Rheumatic oil (Kwangchow)	O	Warm Indicated for pain as well as itch from insect bites and eczema
Mopiko	M	
Musk Anti-Contusion Plasters (Tianjin Drug)	R	Aromatic
Musk plaster (Jingxiutang Pharm)	R	Aromatic
Musk Rheumatic oil (Guangdong Medicines)	R,O	Aromatic and warm
Musk Rheumatism-Expelling Plasters (Guilin Fourth Pharm.)	R	Aromatic
Ni Tian/Yee Tin Tong Oil	J	
Notoginseng Herbal Analgesic Liniment	M	Camphor free
Notoginseng Herbal Analgesic Liniment (Guangxi Med.)	O	Warm to Neutral Warm to neutral, good massage oil for sore muscles
Po Sum On	O	
Porous Capsicum Plaster	O	Hot
Red Dragon Balm	O	Warm
Salonpas Plasters	O	Warm to neutral, focused on pain
san qi powder	B	
Shang Shi Bao Zhen Medicated Plaster (Shanghai Med. Works)	R	Aromatic and warm For acute injury with redness and swelling
Shaolin Dee Dat Jow (Blue Poppy)	T	
Sprain Ointment (Blue Poppy)	J	
Spring Wind Herbal Muscle and Joint rub (Spring Wind)	J	
Stop Pain (Blue Poppy)	M	
Three Angels Liniment (Blue Poppy)	G	Cool
Tie Bi (Oriental Herb Co.)	T	Training formula, cooling
Tieh Ta Yao Gin (Chu Kiang Brand)	T	Great on severe bruises
Tieh Ta Yao Gin (United Pharm.)	T	
Tieh ta yao jiu (Five Photos brand)	A,T	Great on "Gi burn" and abrasions
tien chi powder	B	
Tiger Balm Red	O,M	Warm
Tiger balm white	M	
Tokhuon Plasters	O	Warm Good for hard swellings, burns, necrotic wounds
Wan Hua Oil (United Pharm)	T,A	

White Dragon Balm	M	
White Flower oil	M	Cool
White Tiger Liniment (Oriental Herb Co.)	G	Cool
White Patch (Wei Labs)	O	Warm
Wood lock oil	M	
Wu yang Plaster for bruise	T	Better than ice on acute injuries
Xi Shang Le Ding (Pham. Factory of TCM)	J	
Xin Fang Shang Shi Bao Zhen Gao Plasters (Shanghai Med. Works)	O	Warm
Yang Cheng Medicated Herbal Plaster	T	Similar to Wu Yang brand
Yun Xiang Jin	O	Warm
Yun Xiang Jing liniment (Yulin)	O	Hot
Yunnan Baiyao liniment	M	
Yunnan Baiyao Plasters	M	
Yunnan pai (bai) yao powder,	B,A	THE stop bleeding formula.
Zheng Gu Shui (Yulin Drug)	J,R	Great on any joint pain, aromatic
Zhitong Gao/ Shang Yao Plasters	O	Warm

T= Tissue damage from trauma, strains, tears, contusions, and bruises

Classic Die da formulas (Dit Dat Jow) are generally based on the ancient formulas Qi Li San, or Die Da wan. They tend to be very good at tissue repair and healing burns, stopping bleeding, reducing pain and swelling as well as long term wound care. Some can be applied to an open wound. They vary in “temperature”, some hot, some cold, and some neutral. Cool formulas are better in acute trauma where there is redness and swelling. Hot formulas are better when there is no redness or swelling. Many of the secret iron fist skin toughening formulas are variations of Die Da formulas. Note that some are meant for immediate treatment after an injury and others are specific for long-term recovery use, or for skin toughening (Training).

B= Bleeding, external and internal, severe bruising

Stop bleeding powders can be packed into deep cuts. It can also be taken internally for possible internal bleeding (seek medical attention). Internally it is useful to control heavy menstrual bleeding. The red pill that is often packaged with the formula is to be used when there is severe trauma with the possibility of the patient going into shock. (Again, seek medical attention)

J= Joint strain or sprain

These are variations of Die da formulas and are specific for “white” tissue, connective tissue with low blood flow, bones, ligaments and tendons. These formulas are great on any joint pain, including carpal tunnel, overuse soreness and tennis elbow. Apply to feet before standing for hours; it really helps.

M= Over-worked exhausted muscles, general after workout soreness and pain

These are common muscle rubs and tend to be oil based with a lot of menthol and camphor. Good for general pain relief.

O= Old (cold) injury aches and pains

No redness or swelling. Heat applied to the area feels good. This is especially true of old injuries that have been over iced, or controlled through over the counter painkillers. These are formulas with warm and hot herbs.

R= Re-injured joints or other tissue

No redness to tissue, possible water or swelling around the joint, dull achy pain. Most of these are musk-based formulas; other camphor/menthol-based formulas can also do well in these situations.

G= Red painful muscles and joints due to chronic injury, rheumatoid arthritis, gout

Tissue is red and “burning painful” and/or warm and tender to the touch.

A= Abrasions, cuts, “Gi burn” and open wounds

These formulas are specifically made to use on broken tissue, and are specific in their ability to heal tissue and stop bleeding. They are good on open cracked skin, cuts and abrasions, as well as burns.

There are countless formulations available as well as secret formulas. These were the products that I was able to get at least an ingredient list for. There are many good herbal formulas for which I could not find any information. I tried to group formulas as best I could, based on the information I have. I have used some of these formulas (not all) on myself and on patients. Comments about the effectiveness of a particular formula are based on my personal experience. There are many products listed that I believe are also very good. I just haven't had opportunity to use them.

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