

## Evidence summary

# Chinese medicine for allergic rhinitis

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This summary of key findings from *Volume 5: Allergic rhinitis*<sup>1</sup> of the Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine monograph series outlines:

- what allergic rhinitis is
- current treatments
- findings from research into classical Chinese medicine literature and modern Chinese medicine clinical studies.

### What is allergic rhinitis?

Allergic rhinitis is a common health issue often associated with asthma and conjunctivitis.<sup>2,3</sup> It is characterised by symptoms such as stuffy or runny nose, itching and sneezing.<sup>4</sup> Allergic rhinitis can be triggered by different allergens, such as pollen, dust mites, mould and animal dander.<sup>4,5</sup>

### Current treatments

Clinical management of allergic rhinitis includes avoiding allergens, using medicines such as antihistamines and corticosteroids, and allergen-specific immunotherapy.<sup>5</sup> However, these treatments don't cure allergic rhinitis and may have side effects. Therefore, many people with allergic rhinitis seek complementary medicine, such as Chinese medicine, to relieve symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

Chinese medicine therapies for allergic rhinitis include Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture. Chinese medicine practitioners base their treatments on the patients' symptoms, relevant clinical textbooks and guidelines, research and clinical experience.

### Classical Chinese medicine literature

The *Encyclopedia of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Zhong Hua Yi Dian)* is a large and important collection of Chinese

medicine books. It includes 44 citations that describe treating symptoms associated with allergic rhinitis with Chinese herbal medicine, including decoctions and inhalations. Acupuncture therapies were also mentioned in 11 citations.

Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture therapies for allergic rhinitis are similar in classical literature and modern clinical studies.

### Modern Chinese medicine clinical studies

To write the *Allergic rhinitis*<sup>1</sup> monograph, nine biomedical databases (five English language and four Chinese language) were searched in May 2014. This search found 318 clinical studies of Chinese medicine therapies for allergic rhinitis. Most studies (213) were randomised controlled trials. An additional search of the International Clinical Trials Registry Platform in May 2022 identified 11 new registered randomised controlled trials of Chinese medicine therapies.

### Chinese herbal medicine

#### *Oral Chinese herbal medicine*

Oral Chinese herbal medicine for allergic rhinitis was evaluated in 156 randomised controlled trials. They showed oral Chinese herbal medicine, especially *Yu ping feng san* 玉屏风散, effectively alleviated nasal symptoms associated with allergic rhinitis.<sup>7</sup> Results also showed the long-term effectiveness of oral Chinese herbal medicine.

Reported adverse events included mild stomach aches and headaches. Chinese herbal medicine combined with conventional medicines reduced adverse events associated with conventional medicines.

One new registered trial also found oral Chinese herbal medicine relieved allergic rhinitis symptoms.

#### *Topical Chinese herbal medicine*

Eleven randomised controlled trials evaluated topical Chinese herbal medicine for allergic rhinitis. They reported it improved overall symptoms with no adverse events.

No new registered trials of topical Chinese herbal medicine for allergic rhinitis were identified.

#### **Acupuncture and related therapies**

Thirty-two randomised controlled trials assessed the effects of acupuncture-related therapies, including body acupuncture, auricular acupuncture and moxibustion, on allergic rhinitis.

Results showed body acupuncture was more effective than conventional medicines for relieving allergic rhinitis symptoms, while moxibustion was no different to conventional medicines. Acupuncture-related therapies were reported as safe.

Ten new relevant registered randomised controlled trials for allergic rhinitis were identified since 2018. They supported the benefits of body acupuncture, auricular acupressure, combining moxibustion with corticosteroid nasal sprays, and combining body acupressure with antihistamines.

#### **Key messages**

- Chinese medicine treatments have been used throughout history to treat allergic rhinitis-related symptoms.
- Treatment approaches for allergic rhinitis include oral and topical Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture and moxibustion.
- Oral Chinese herbal medicine may reduce allergic rhinitis symptoms.
- Body acupuncture is a more effective treatment for allergic rhinitis than conventional medicines.
- Clinicians and patients should discuss potential risks and benefits, so patients can make informed choices about care.

## **For more information**

You can find out more about Chinese medicine for allergic rhinitis in the book *Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine Volume 5: Allergic Rhinitis*<sup>1</sup> from <https://doi.org/10.1142/10421>

To find out more about Chinese medicine research at the China–Australia International Centre for Chinese Medicine, visit [www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/multi-partner-collaborations/cairccm](http://www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/multi-partner-collaborations/cairccm)

#### **References**

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#### **Disclaimer**

This evidence summary is not intended as a guide for self-medication or medical advice – patients should seek professional advice from qualified Chinese medicine practitioners.