

Understanding Ingredients to Avoid Improper Western-Chinese Drug Interactions

Using herbs as medicine or health food is very popular worldwide. However, people have a conceptual mistake that Chinese medicines are always safe. Toxicity due to Chinese medicines has been kept hearing. Therefore the possible adverse effects that may arise from drug interactions between herbal preparations and standard modern therapies are equally worrying.

It is difficult to standardize the constituents of Chinese medicines as various factors affect their chemical contents, qualities and efficacies. Besides, insufficient instructions of some proprietary Chinese medicines (pCm), anonymous Chinese medicine prescriptions which underwent no clinical testing, counterfeits, and unreasonable usage make taking Chinese medicines not as safe as we think.

In view of this, in June 2003, HKU set up the Drug Standardization Laboratory to test the quantity of heavy metals and pesticides in Chinese medicines. The results may help the Department of Health to regulate Chinese medicines.

Since concomitant use of Western and Chinese medicines may cancel out their respective effects, or even lead to adverse outcomes due to the altered absorption or metabolism of the medicines, one should avoid taking Chinese and Western medicines concurrently, or take them at least 48 hours apart if it is inevitable to do so. Study the advertisements wisely and consult doctor or pharmacist immediately if in doubt.