

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Plagued by ills

The world is on high alert about a possible pandemic of avian flu. Worries about pandemics, however, are not new.

Plagues were a major problem in ancient China. They were called *wenyi* (pestilence), which covers any kind of fatal epidemic disease. Physician Wu Youxing (1580-1660) published a book called *Wenyilun* (On Pestilence) in 1642, which describes the specific symptoms of different kinds of epidemic diseases and proposed the theory of *liqi* (pestilential evil).

He stated that pestilence wasn't caused by ordinary exogenous pathogens (such as wind, cold, summer heat, dryness and dampness), but by pathogens that were highly infectious.

Attacks of *liqi* are usually related to unusual climate problems such as droughts, floods and extreme heat, as well as pollution and unsanitary conditions.

With pestilence, penetration of the body was through the mouth and nose. Its occurrence

depended on the quantity and virulence of the *liqi* and the body's resistance. Wu also claimed that each pestilence was associated with its own *liqi* and could be treated by herbs.

He pointed out that the *liqi* affecting humans were different from that occurring in animals.

Later, Wu Tang (1758-1836) wrote in his book *Wenbing Tiaobian* (Differentiation of Febrile Illness) that pestilence corresponds to changes affecting the "triple burner" in the body.

They usually progress from the upper burner (lungs, heart and diaphragm) to the middle burner (spleen and stomach), and then to the lower burner (liver, kidneys, intestines and bladder). This means that *liqi* enters through the nose and mouth, attacking the lungs and stomach, respectively. The affected lungs might then pass it on to the heart.

In the early stages of infection, protective *chi* from the lungs is the main force to fight against *liqi*. Wu created two formulas – honeysuckle (left) and forsythia powder (*yin qiao san*), and mulberry leaf and chrysanthemum decoction (*sang ju yin*) – to eliminate the initial invasion of pathogens. These herbal ingredients are combined to facilitate the flow of protective *chi*, clear heat and detoxify.

These days, these formulas are widely used to treat disorders such as upper respiratory tract infections, influenza and acute bronchitis.

But when suffering from flu or a cold, if a person's body resistance is strong or only slightly weakened when fighting it off, it's not recommended to take tonics or immune-boosting supplements during this time.

In traditional Chinese medicine theory, this can overwhelm the natural body resistance and will cause a fierce struggle with the invading pathogens, leading to a chronic and more complex situation.

Immune-boosting remedies are best taken before a person gets sick – as prevention – or during the recovery phase of an infection.

*Please consult your medical or TCM practitioner before taking any medicine*