

Management of Chinese herbal medicines containing sulphur dioxide.

The application of fumigating Chinese herbal medicines by the sulphur dioxide (SO₂) gas produced from burning sulphur can protect the Chinese herbal medicines from insects and mould and for better preservation. However, Chinese herbal medicines should not be over-fumigated, or else the excessive sulphur dioxide residues may cause adverse reactions. People who are allergic to sulphur dioxide may develop symptoms like shortness of breath, headache and nausea.

Although sulphur dioxide residues may cause adverse reaction, since sulphur dioxide is highly soluble in water, most of the sulphur dioxide content can be removed by washing and cooking. The sulphur dioxide residues in the Chinese herbal medicines can be markedly lowered by proper washing, soaking and decoction.

In addition, the fumigated Chinese herbal medicines may carry brighter colour and sour taste. Chinese herbal medicines with exceptional bright colour and sour and pungent smell may be over-fumigated. The public are advised to purchase Chinese herbal medicines from licensed Chinese medicine retailers. If in doubt, one should stop consuming the Chinese herbal medicines in doubt and seek advice from healthcare professionals.

To conclude, the using of Chinese herbal medicines should depend on individual's body constitution and the respective disease condition. Therefore, the public are advised to consult Chinese medicine practitioner before using Chinese herbal medicines. In addition, for preparing decoction of Chinese herbal medicines, the public should rinse the Chinese herbal medicines under running water to remove dirt and to keep the Chinese herbal medicines clean, as well as thoroughly soak the Chinese herbal medicines in clean water.

Please refer to the following pamphlet for the proper way to prepare Chinese herbal medicine decoction:

http://www.cmd.gov.hk/html/eng/health_info/pamphlet/pdf/Preparing_Herbal_Decoctions_en_pp.pdf

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