

Herbal trials flawed but worth pursuing

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Researchers say Chinese trials using an herbal remedy with conventional treatments to treat angina showed some benefits but are unreliable.

Wu Taixiang, an associate professor at Sichuan University, reviewed trials that showed taking tongxinluo -- a powder of ground herbs and insects -- improved electrocardiogram results for angina patients. Taixiang, in the current issue of The Cochrane Library, said they reviewed the analysis from 18 trials, most of which examined the effect of tongxinluo when used with more common angina treatments, compared with conventional treatments alone.

The study's authors said they felt a "social responsibility" to review the studies because the remedy is a popular traditional treatment in Asia.

Taixiang said while some of the studies showed the treatment improved the condition of angina patients and did improve electrocardiogram readings, it did not show that it prevented heart attacks or reduced the need for angioplasty or bypass surgery. He said they would not recommend using the drugs based on the poor quality of some of the trials.

Cardiologist Dr. James L. Weiss at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine said the effectiveness of togxinlou on angina would require a better controlled clinical trial with a large number of participants.

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