

Study finds Tianjiu therapy improves allergic rhinitis patients' daily life quality

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Tianjiu therapy is known as "herbal moxibustion" or "acupoint herbal patching," which involves the application of a paste made from powdered Chinese medicine herbs on specific acupoints to stimulate and regulate the meridians and collaterals system. Credit: Hong Kong Baptist University

The School of Chinese Medicine (SCM) of Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) recently conducted a "Tianjiu therapy for allergic rhinitis: A double-blinded randomised Placebo-controlled clinical trial". It found that Tianjiu therapy helped to alleviate the symptoms of nasal itching suffered by allergic rhinitis patients. Furthermore, it also enhanced patients' quality of life in terms of their everyday activities, including sleeping and general nasal symptoms.

Allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever, is an inflammation of the nose and eyes which occurs when the immune system overreacts to allergens in the air such as pollen, pet hair, dust and mould. The typical symptoms include a runny or blocked nose, sneezing, itchy and watery eyes, and swelling around the eyes. Currently, around 10-20% of the world's population suffers from allergic rhinitis. Patients usually receive routine symptomatic pharmacotherapies, or immunotherapy, depending on their [health condition](#). However, these treatments do not obtain satisfactory results, as only one third of adult patients experience satisfactory relief. It is also difficult to determine the optimal use, the appropriate initiation timing and proper duration of the immunotherapy [treatment](#).

From the perspective of Chinese medicine, allergic rhinitis is mainly caused by the attack of exogenous evils, deficiency of organs and an abnormal body institution. Both internal and external Chinese medicine treatments are concurrently used to treat this disease, one of which is called Tianjiu [therapy](#). This therapy is also known as "herbal moxibustion" or "acupoint herbal patching", which involves the application of a paste made from powdered Chinese medicine herbs on specific acupoints to stimulate and regulate the meridians and collaterals system. It has a long history in treating multiple respiratory diseases such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In addition, it helps to regulate the functions of meridians and organs, and to invigorate the physical institution.

To evaluate the efficacy and safety of Tianjiu therapy for treating allergic rhinitis, the School of Chinese medicine of HKBU recruited 138 individuals to take part in the clinical trial in the summer of last year. All participants were required to undergo a symptoms assessment and body checkup. They ranged in age from 18 to 68, and were diagnosed as chronic patients who have been suffering from allergic rhinitis for periods of two to 45 years. The participants were divided into three groups: 46 persons each for the Tianjiu, Placebo, and Waitlist/Control groups. They were assigned to receive a treatment once a week for a total of four weeks.

During this period the research team conducted six [symptom](#) assessments for the participants. The treatment for the Tianjiu group contained herbs that are specially used for Tianjiu therapy for allergic rhinitis, while the treatment for the Placebo group was a prescription composed of glutinous rice and soya beans. Several acupoints were specially selected for the therapy for these two groups. The acupoints focused on stabilising and regulating the centre of qi, keeping the nasal passage open, while also strengthening the pulmonal and renal orb.

Research Assistant Professor of the SCM Clinical Division Dr Zhong Lidan, who took part in the trial, explained that preliminary findings indicated that after four weeks of treatment, the nasal symptoms in the Tianjiu group had significantly improved compared to those in both the Placebo and Waitlist/Control groups with an average improvement rate of 43.3%. The efficacy outcome was measured based on the four nasal symptoms: rhinorrhea, nasal itching, nasal obstruction, and sneezing.

On the other hand, both the Tianjiu and Placebo groups performed better than the Waitlist/Control group in respect of the participants' daily activities, sleeping quality and general nasal symptoms, while the degree of improvement was more significant in the Tianjiu group with an average improvement rate of 22.6%. The efficacy outcome was

measured according to seven aspects of life quality: sleep, non-rhinoconjunctivitis symptoms, practical problems, nasal symptoms, ocular symptoms, activity limitations, and emotional function. It also found that during the four-week period of follow-up after the treatment, a sustainable improvement in the four nasal symptoms was observed in the Tianjiu group with an average improvement rate of 39.5%.

Dr Zhong said the research team hopes to expand the number of participants in the study to 600 in future and further explore how Tianjiu therapy works in treating [allergic rhinitis](#). She explained that the advantage of such therapy is that it adjusts the patient's health condition with an effect that is sustainable. Dr Zhong advised people suffering from this disease to take good care of their respiratory tracts, and to avoid spicy, raw or cold food in their daily diets.

Provided by Hong Kong Baptist University

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