

Guideline on Proper Use of Fructus Xanthii

Fructus Xanthii

Fructus Xanthii is a Chinese herbal medicine included in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance. Its origin is the ripe bur with involucre of *Xanthium sibiricum* Patr. (Fam. Compositae). Its processed form includes Fructus Xanthii and stir-baked Fructus Xanthii. In ancient times, its processing involved stir-baking the herb and removing its spines. It has slight odour and is slightly bitter. The functions of the herb are to dispel wind and damp, and to relieve nasal obstruction. It is often used in treating headache caused by wind-cold, sinusitis with nasal discharge, urticaria with itching; arthritis with muscle contracture caused by wind-damp.

2. According to pharmacological research, Fructus Xanthii contains toxic components. Overdosage, prolonged use, improper processing and difference in individual constitution may result in poisoning. Studies have shown that symptoms of poisoning may develop 12 to 36 hours, or even earlier, after overdose. The degree of poisoning is proportional to the dose taken. Toxic symptoms include dizziness, nausea, vomiting and those related to the digestive tract, jaundice, derangement of liver function, hepatomegaly, edema, oliguria and hematuria. In certain cases, severe reactions like somnolence, coma and clonic seizure, may occur. Chronic poisoning is usually caused by the cumulative effect of prolonged use of Fructus Xanthii due to the lack of obvious adverse reactions at the early stage of administration. It eventually leads to damages to the cardiac muscle and liver.

3. It is noted that Fructus Xanthii sold in Hong Kong mainly comes from Mainland. They are not stir-baked and the quality is not standardized. When Fructus Xanthii is prescribed by Chinese medicine practitioners, usually the non-stir-baked form is dispensed. In view of the poisoning cases reported locally and overseas, Department of Health, after seeking opinions from the Chinese Medicines Board and the Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board of the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong, provides the following Guideline on the Proper Use of Fructus Xanthii to the Chinese medicine profession and the Chinese medicine trade, to facilitate understanding in the proper processing, handling and use of the herb.

Processing, handling and use of Fructus Xanthii

- (i) Wholesalers and retailers of Chinese herbal medicines should follow the requirements as set out in the Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China (Edition 2000) when processing of the herb is needed:

Fructus Xanthii Eliminate foreign matters
(For external use):

Stir-baked Fructus Xanthii Place clean Fructus Xanthii in a pot.
(For oral administration): Stir-bake the herbs with gentle heat until they turn yellowish-brown. Remove the spines and sift afterwards.

- (ii) When Fructus Xanthii is to be taken orally, they should not be pounded or ground into powder.
- (iii) Chinese medicine practitioners should indicate "Stir-baked Fructus Xanthii" when it is prescribed for oral administration. Non-stir-baked Fructus Xanthii should only be prescribed for external use.
- (iv) Retailers of Chinese herbal medicines should dispense "Stir-baked Fructus Xanthii" when the prescription is for oral administration. If it is prescribed for external use, non-stir-baked ones should be dispensed. When there are doubts, they should contact the Chinese medicine practitioners concerned to clarify the prescription.
- (v) Take note of the dosage and duration of use. The daily dosage should be in accordance with recommendation stated in the Pharmacopoeia of the People's Republic of China (Edition 2000): 3~9 g for an adult. Use suitable quantity for external application. The dosage should be adjusted for children and elderly. The duration of use should not be too long, and the patient's conditions should be closely observed.
- (vi) Avoid using in persons with liver and kidney problems. Use with caution for the elderly, frail persons and children.
- (vii) Stop using it immediately and seek medical advice when adverse reactions occur.

Department of Health

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