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REVIEW

Shenqi pill, a traditional Chinese herbal formula, for the treatment of hypertension: A systematic review



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Summary

Background: Shenqi pill, a traditional Chinese herbal formula, is widely prescribed for hypertensive patients with kidney *yang* deficiency syndrome in China. This study aims to examine the efficacy and safety of Shenqi pill for the treatment of hypertension.

Methods: A systematic search of the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, PubMed, EMBASE, the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure, the Chinese Scientific Journal Database, the Chinese Biomedical Literature Database, and the Wanfang Database was conducted from their inception up to October 7, 2014. All randomized controlled trials (RCTs) testing Shenqi pill alone or combined with western medicine against placebo, no intervention or western medicine in hypertensive patients were included.

Results: A total of 4 RCTs comparing Shenqi pill plus western medicine with western medicine were included. Shenqi pill as complementary therapy exhibited a relatively small with no significant reduction on blood pressure, and showed remarkable improvement on sexual function, lipid profile and some biochemical indicators of hypertensive renal damage compared to western medicine used alone. The safety of Shenqi pill is still unknown.

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Conclusions: This systematic review firstly provided no definite evidence for the efficacy and safety of Shenqi pill for hypertension based on the insufficient data. More rigorously designed RCTs focusing on sexual dysfunction and hypertensive renal damage are warranted to give high level of evidence.

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Introduction

High blood pressure (BP) is the major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) and mortality globally, which affects about one billion or one in three adults worldwide.¹ Recently updated guidelines for the management of high blood pressure from the Eighth Joint National Committee (JNC 8) stressed the importance of evidence-based treatment thresholds, goals, and medications.² Although effective therapies have been readily available for more than 50 years,³ only 46.5% of hypertensive patients were aware of the diagnosis and 32.5% of those being treated had controlled BP according to the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study.⁴ Unavoidable adverse effects of antihypertensive drugs, inadequate improvement of hypertension-related symptoms and discomfort are still confronted by both physicians and patients. Therefore, combination strategies incorporating complementary and alternative approaches might be helpful to achieve BP control among individuals with pre-hypertension

and hypertension based on the recommendations by the American Heart Association (AHA).⁵ There is increasing evidences to support the use of complementary therapies for hypertension, including tai chi,⁶ qigong,⁷ yoga,⁸ baduanjin exercise,⁹ acupuncture,¹⁰ moxibustion,¹¹ massage,¹² dietary supplements,¹³ and herbal medicine.¹⁴

The use of Shenqi pill can be trace back to almost 2000 years ago in ancient China. It is a traditional Chinese herbal formula dispensed by *Zhang Zhongjing* in Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber (also named *Jin Kui Yao Lue* in Mandarin). It is comprised of 8 commonly used herbs, including Cassia twig (Guizhi, *Ramulus Cinnamomi Cassiae*), Processed aconite (Fuzi, *Radix Lateralis Praeparatus Aconiti Carmichaeli*), Rehmannia (Dihuang, *Radix Rehmanniae Glutinosae*), Cornus Fruit (Shanzhuyu, *Corni Fructus*), Dioscorea Root (Shanyao, *Dioscoreae Rhizoma*), Poria (Fuling, *Scierotium Poriae Cocos*), Alisma (Zexie, *Rhizoma Alismatis*), and Cortex of the Peony Tree Rote (Danpi, *Cortex Radicis Moutan*). According to our previous study, kidney *yang* deficiency syndrome is the key pathogenesis

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