

## 话 谈 中 药 (十一)

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### 号称“国老”的中药——甘草

在丰富多彩的中药宝库中，甘草是一味既普通而又重要的药物。说它普通，是因为它药源丰富、药价低廉；说它重要，则是因为它在众多的中药方剂里，往往起着多方面的微妙作用。

自古以来，甘草便为医家所重视，并有着多种美好的称号。我国现存古代第一部中药学专著《神农本草经》把甘草列为“上品”。公元五世纪的名医陶弘景所辑的《名医别录》，称它为美草、蜜草、还有“国老”这样的尊称。陶宏景说：“国老即帝师之称，虽非君而为君所宗，是以能安和草石，而解诸毒也。”又说：甘草“最为众药之主，经方少有不用者。”七世纪甄权也说它“调和众药有功，故有国老之号”。

然而，甘草决不只是担负调和众药的重任，也不仅限于能解诸毒，它确实有多方面的功效。《神农本草经》记载，甘草有坚筋骨，长肌肉，倍力及解毒之功，能治五脏六腑寒热邪气与金疮肿。《名医别录》说甘草能温中，下气，止咳止渴，解百药毒。杰出的医药学家李时珍的《本草纲目》则说它能普治百邪。

甘草有生用与炙用之别。中医临床上早已总结出，甘草生用则通，炙用则补的经验。凡属肺虚咳嗽、脾虚便溏，应健脾益气者，多用炙甘草；而清火解毒、湿疹、疮痍发热等，多用生甘草。

甘草的根茎和根含有甘草甜素，甘草酸，甘草次酸，甘草黄甙，还原糖，淀粉，胶质及矿物质等。甘草之所以有甜味，主要是甘草甜素所致。

胃酸过多的胃肠道溃疡病，甘草能抑制其胃酸分泌，从而产生一定的治疗作用。甘草的润喉止咳功效，是因为它能保护咽喉部粘膜表面，从而减少粘膜受刺激。

甘草的解毒功能，主要是甘草酸分解的葡萄糖醛酸与毒素发生反应的结果。实验证明，甘草能消除或减低氯化铵、组织胺、水合氯醛、苯砷、升汞的毒性；对河豚毒、蛇毒、白喉毒素、破伤风毒素也有一定的解毒作用。

此外，甘草还具有降低高血压患者的胆固醇以及镇痛，抗惊厥等功效。

甘草的毒副作用较小，但若长期单独大量服用，有可能引起水肿、血压升高及血钾减少等情况。然而，只要服用恰当，这些不利的反应是完全可以避免的。

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## LICORICE—THE TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE CALLED “THE NATIONAL VENERABLE MASTER<sup>(1)</sup>”

In the rich and varied treasure-house of traditional Chinese medicine, licorice is at once common and<sup>(2)</sup> important—common, because it is abundant and low-priced, important, because it plays a subtle and many-sided part in<sup>(3)</sup> a great number of prescriptions of traditional Chinese medicine.

Since ancient times, much attention has been paid to licorice, and quite a few beautiful names have been given to it. In “Shennong's Herbal”, the first Materia Medica of ancient China that is extant, licorice was classified as a “superior” herb. In “Transactions of Famous Physicians”<sup>(4)</sup> compiled by the renowned physician Tao Hong-jing of the 5th century A.D., licorice was called the beautiful herb or honey herb, an honorific title, namely “the National Venerable Master” was also conferred on it. Tao Hong-jing said, “‘The National Venerable Master’ is the name given to the tutor of emperor. He is not an emperor, yet is respected by the emperor himself. This name is applied to the plant on account of its virtue of harmonizing and mollifying herbs and minerals<sup>(5)</sup> and eliminating various toxicities”<sup>(6)</sup>. “Licorice exerts a most important influence on other medicines, and few classic prescriptions can do without it”<sup>(7)</sup>, he also added. Zhen Quan of the 7th century A.D. said, “Licorice has the merit of harmonizing drugs, so it is honored with the title ‘the National Venerable Master’ ”.

Licorice, however, does not solely shoulder the heavy task of harmonizing drugs, nor does it limit itself to the work of clearing up toxic factors<sup>(8)</sup>, it is efficacious in many other respects as well. According to “Shennong's Herbal”, licorice solidifies sinews and bones<sup>(9)</sup>, promotes the growth of muscles<sup>(10)</sup>, doubles strength<sup>(11)</sup> and alleviates toxicity<sup>(12)</sup>, it cures pathogenic factors of cold and heat in the Five Viscera and the Six Bowels<sup>(13)</sup> as well as swellings due to incised wound<sup>(14)</sup>. It is written in “Transactions of Famous Physicians” that licorice warms the spleen and the stomach and keeps perverted air going downward<sup>(15)</sup> and that it not only relieves cough and thirst but also the poisoning effects of a hundred drugs. In the “Compendium of Materia Medica” compiled by the outstanding physician and pharmacologist Li Shi-zhen, licorice is said to be effective against a hundred pathogenic factors<sup>(16)</sup>.

Licorice is used in two different ways, unbaked or stir-baked with adjuvants. The former, as has been summed up by clinical experience, produces a purgative effect<sup>(17)</sup> while the latter results in tonifying effect<sup>(18)</sup>. Baked licorice is used to invigorate the function of the spleen<sup>(19)</sup> and reinforce its vital energy<sup>(20)</sup> as in the case of a cough due to deficiency in the lung<sup>(21)</sup> or of loose bowel due to deficiency in the spleen<sup>(22)</sup>, raw licorice is often used to dispel toxic heat or to treat eczema, or fever caused by sores<sup>(23)</sup>, etc.

The rhizome and root of licorice contain glycyrrhizin, glycyrrhizic acid<sup>(24)</sup>, glycyrrhetic acid<sup>(25)</sup>, liquiritin<sup>(26)</sup>, reduced sugar, starch, gummy substances<sup>(27)</sup>, mineral salts, etc. Its sweet taste results from the glycyrrhizin it contains.

It is effective for the treatment of gastric ulcer<sup>(28)</sup> by inhibiting the excess secretion of gastric acid. It moistens the throat and relieves cough by protecting the surface of the mucous membrane and preventing it from being irritated.

Licorice is capable of relieving pathogenic factors as a result of the reaction of glucuronic acid<sup>(29)</sup>, given off by glycyrrhizic acid, with toxins. Experiments show that licorice removes or alleviates the toxic properties of ammonium chloride, histamine<sup>(30)</sup>, chloral hydrate<sup>(31)</sup>, arseno benzene<sup>(32)</sup> and mercuric chloride and that it has curative effect for the treatment of poisoning caused by globefish or snakes, or for relieving toxins owing to diphtheria<sup>(33)</sup> or tetanus<sup>(34)</sup>.

In addition, licorice has the effect of reducing the cholesterol of the patient suffering from high blood pressure and relieves pain and convulsion. It has little side effects unless taken in large quantities and for long periods, in which case, there will appear edema<sup>(35)</sup>, hypertension<sup>(36)</sup> and the reduction of potassium in the blood. But these adverse effects can be avoided if the drug is appropriately administered.

#### 〔注释〕

(1) The National Venerable Master 国老 (2) at once...and... 既...又... (3) to play a part in 在...起作用 (4) Transactions of Famous Physicians 名医别录 (5) harmonizing and mollifying herbs and minerals 安和草石 (6) eliminating various toxicities 解诸毒 (7) to do without... 没有...也行 (8) clearing up toxic factors 解毒 (9) to solidify sinews and bones 坚筋骨 (10) to promote the growth of muscles 长肌肉 (11) to double strength 倍力 (12) to alleviate toxicity 解毒 (13) pathogenic factors of cold and heat in the Five Viscera and the Six Bowels 五脏六腑寒热邪气 (14) swellings due to

incised wound 金疮肿 (15) to warm the spleen and the stomach and keep  
perverted air downward 温中下气 (16) a hundred pathogenic factors 百邪  
(17) The former produces a purgative effect 前者(生用)则通 (18) the latter  
results in tonifying effect 后者(炙用)则补 (19) to invigorate the function  
of the spleen 健脾 (20) to reinforce its vital energy 益气 (21) deficiency in  
the lung 肺虚 (22) deficiency in the spleen 脾虚 (23) to dispel toxic heat or  
to treat eczema, fever caused by sores 清火解毒或治湿疹、疮痍发热 (24) gly-  
cyrrhizic acid 甘草酸(25)glycyrrhetic acid 甘草次酸 (26) liquiritin 甘草黄甙  
(27) gummy substances 胶质 (28) gastric ulcer 胃溃疡 (29) glucuronic acid  
葡萄糖醛酸 (30) histamine 组织胺 (31) chloral hydrate 水合氯醛 (32) arseno  
benzene 苯砷 (33) diphtheria 白喉 (34) tetanus 破伤风 (35) edema 水肿 (36)  
hypertention 高血压