

Your Guide to Chinese Topical Liniments & Oils

**Fast-acting pain relief you can keep
in your kit**



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What Are Liniments?

Liniments are liquid or semi-liquid herbal preparations that are applied to the skin to help relieve pain, reduce stiffness, and speed up recovery after injury. Think of them as a kind of herbal “rub-on” remedy—designed to get to work quickly on sore muscles, bruises, and joint aches without needing to take anything by mouth.

Most liniments feel either cooling or warming, depending on their ingredients. You might feel a strong menthol tingle, or a deep heat that seeps into tight muscles. Some work best right after a fresh injury. Others are ideal for chronic pain or old injuries that flare up in cold weather.

A Long History of Use

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), liniments have been used for hundreds of years to move Qi (vital energy) and Blood, especially in areas that are stuck, bruised, or painful. Trauma, overuse, or cold can slow the free flow of Qi and Blood in the body, which TCM sees as one of the root causes of pain.

Many formulas were originally used by martial artists and bone-setting doctors to help with sprains, bruises, and bone injuries—hence the name of some formulas like Zheng Gu Shui, meaning “Correct the Bone Water.”

Why Use a Liniment?

- Fast local relief – they go straight to the sore area
- Easy to carry – great for gym bags, work kits or travel
- Useful between acupuncture sessions to keep healing going
- Can be combined with acupressure, massage, or stretching

Some liniments soak in and act deep under the skin. Others stay on the surface and cool like ice. The key is matching the right liniment to your type of pain—and this booklet will help you do exactly that.

How to Use Them Safely

Chinese herbal liniments are powerful natural tools, but like any remedy, they need to be used with care.

Here are some key safety guidelines to follow:

- ✓ **For External Use Only**
Never drink liniments or apply them to broken or open skin.
- ✓ **Avoid Eyes and Sensitive Areas**
Wash hands after applying. Be careful around the face, mucous membranes, and genitals.
- ✓ **Do a Patch Test First**
Try a small amount on the inside of your forearm. Wait 15–30 minutes to check for redness or irritation.
- ✓ **Not for Children Under 3 Years**
Some liniments are too strong for young skin. Keep out of reach of children unless advised by a practitioner.
- ✓ **Caution in Pregnancy & Breastfeeding**
Many liniments contain strong herbs or essential oils that may not be suitable. Check with your practitioner first.
- ✓ **Aspirin Allergy Warning**
Some liniments contain methyl salicylate (wintergreen), which is related to aspirin.
⚠️ Avoid if you're allergic to aspirin or taking blood-thinning medication.

General Tips

- Store in a cool, dry place
- Keep lids tightly closed to avoid spills or evaporation
- If irritation occurs, wash off and discontinue use

TCM Tip

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, warming liniments are often used for old injuries, cold joints, and stiffness, while cooling liniments help with fresh pain, swelling, or inflammation.

Choosing the right one for your condition makes a big difference.

Zheng Gu Shui

正骨水 – “Correct-Bone Water”

What it feels like

Cool sting that settles into steady warmth.

Best for

- Bruises, day-two sprains, stiff or “stuck” joints.
- Traditionally used in Chinese medicine to help the body clear bruising and support bone health.

How to use

Rub a thin layer over the sore spot 2–4 times a day, or soak a cotton pad and tape it on for half an hour.

Active botanicals

- Camphor (Zhāng Nǎo)
- Menthol (Bò Hé Chún)
- Tien-qi ginseng (Tián Qī)
- Moutan bark (Mǔ Dān Pí)
- Dalbergia wood (Jiàng Xiāng)

Safety

- External use only.
- Keep well clear of eyes and broken skin.
- Do not use while pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Not for kids under three.



Always follow label directions. If symptoms persist, chat with your healthcare professional.

Brand names are trademarks of their owners and appear for identification only.

Wood Lock Oil

“活絡油”Circulation-activating oil”

What it feels like

Slow, penetrating heat —like a pocket heat-pack.

Best for

Deep muscle knots, cold-damp low-back stiffness, chronic knee pain.

How to use

- Warm 3–5 drops between my palms, then massage until the skin feels toasty.
- Up to four times daily.

Active botanicals

- Myrrh (Mò Yào)
- Frankincense (Rǔ Xiāng)
- Angelica pubescens root (Dú Huó)
- Achyranthes root (Niú Xī)
- Wintergreen oil (Dōng Qīng Yóu)
- Turpentine oil (Sōng Jié Yóu)

Safety

- Highly aromatic—keep away from eyes, mucous membranes and broken skin
- Not for pregnancy, breastfeeding, or children under three.
- Avoid if allergic to aspirin or taking blood thinners



Po Sum On Medicated Oil

保心安油 “Protect-the-Heart-Calm” Oil

What it feels like

Mild mint-cinnamon tingle with a deep herbal scent.

Best for

Stress-shoulder tightness, light chest congestion, small-joint aches.

How to use

Lightly massage 2–3 times daily or inhale from a tissue for a blocked nose.

Active botanicals

- Peppermint oil (Bò Hé Yóu)
- Dragon's blood resin (Xuè Jié)
- Scutellaria root (Huáng Qín)
- Cinnamon bark (Ròu Guì)
- Licorice (Gān Cǎo)

Safety

- External use only.
- Keep away from eyes and broken skin.
- Do not use while pregnant, breastfeeding, or under three.



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Eagle Brand Medicated Oil

德國風油精 “German Wind Essential Oil”

What it feels like

Sharp menthol zap that cools fast.

Best for

Neck and shoulder tightness, mild arthritic aches, tension headaches.

How to use

Massage in a few drops (dilute if the mint hit feels fierce) up to four times daily.

Key actives

- Menthol (Bò Hé Chún)
- Wintergreen oil/methyl salicylate (Dōng Qīng Yóu)
- Eucalyptus oil (Ān Yè Yóu)
- Camphor (Zhāng Nǎo)

Safety

- Strong minty vapours—keep away from eyes.
- External use only.
- Don't use if pregnant, breastfeeding, or under three.
- Avoid if allergic to aspirin or taking blood thinners



Kwan Loong

强龙油 “Strong Dragon Oil”

What it feels like

Icy burst; clears the nose as it cools.

Best for

Mild muscle tension, tight temples, stuffy sinuses.

How to use

- Rub gently into sore spots or dab on a tissue and inhale.
- Repeat 2–4 times a day.

Active botanicals

- Menthol (Bò Hé Chún)
- Wintergreen oil (Dōng Qīng Yóu)
- Eucalyptus oil (Ān Yè Yóu)
- Camphor (Zhāng Nǎo)

Safety

- Patch-test sensitive skin.
- External use only.
- Avoid during pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- Keep away from kids under three.
- Avoid if allergic to aspirin or taking blood thinners



Always follow label directions. If symptoms persist, chat with your healthcare professional.

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White Flower Embrocation

白花油 “White Flower Oil”

What it feels like

Cooling rush that eases into gentle warmth.

Best for

Tension headaches, minor muscle strains, travel stiffness.

How to use it

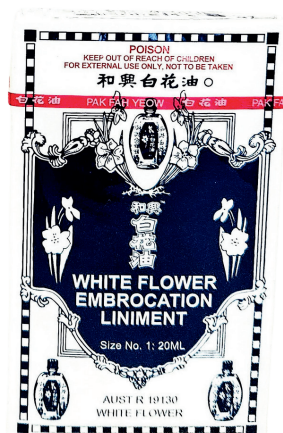
- Place a few drops on skin and massage until absorbed.
- For headaches, rub temples and neck.

Active botanicals

- Menthol (Bò Hé Chún)
- Wintergreen oil (Dōng Qīng Yóu)
- Camphor (Zhāng Nǎo)
- Eucalyptus oil (Ān Yè Yóu)
- Lavender oil (Xūn Yī Cǎo Yóu)

Safety

- Avoid eyes, mouth, and broken skin.
- External use only.
- Do not use in pregnancy, breastfeeding, or children under three.
- Avoid if allergic to aspirin or taking blood thinners



Ingredient Comparison

Which Liniment Has What?

Each liniment has its own personality—some heat, some cool, some go deep. Here's a comparison of their main active ingredients and how they feel when applied.

Liniment	Camphor	Menthol	Methyl Salicylate (Wintergreen oil)	Other Key Actives	Overall Feel
Zheng Gu Shui 正骨水	5.6%	5.6%	—	Dang Gui, Myrrh, Safflower, Notoginseng, Rhubarb	Cool sting, then deep warmth
Wood Lock Oil 活絡油	10%	16%	50%	Turpentine, Lavender oil	Very warming, deep-penetrating
Po Sum On 保心安油	—	15%	—	Peppermint, Cinnamon, Dragon's Blood, Skullcap, Licorice	Gentle warming, slightly spicy
Eagle Brand Oil 德國風油精	7%	16%	35%	Eucalyptus, Lavender	Very cooling, minty shock
Kwan Loong Oil 強龍油	—	16%	35%	Eucalyptus oil	Fast-drying, surface cooling
White Flower Oil 白花油	6%	15%	40%	Eucalyptus, Lavender, Peppermint	Balanced cool-then-warm

“Which oil when?” quick reference		
Problem	Cool-first choice (reduce sharp pain & swelling)	Warm-first choice (drive blood & loosen knots)
Neck tension or screen-strain headache	White Flower – dab on temples & neck	Wood Lock – tiny rub into traps
Fresh corkie or bruise	Eagle Brand – 30 sec circular rub, ice-like feel	Zheng Gu Shui – firm massage after 24 h
Garden sprain with swelling	Kwan Loong – quick spray-on cool	Po Sum On – switch once heat subsides
Old stiff ankle or chronic joint ache	Kwan Loong – pre-move limber	Wood Lock – nightly deep heat
Post-workout DOMS	White Flower – light coat before stretch	Zheng Gu Shui – post-shower rub-in
Head-cold chest congestion	Eagle Brand – chest rub, cup hands & inhale	Po Sum On – warm scarf over rubbed chest

How to Apply for Best Results

Liniments work best when used properly. It's not just about rubbing it in—it's about when, how, and how much.

Quick Steps

1. Clean the skin. Wipe away sweat, creams or dirt first.
2. Shake well (if liquid). Herbs and oils can settle—give it a shake.
3. Use a small amount. A few drops or a thin layer is usually enough.
4. Rub or dab, based on type. Cooling oils (e.g. White Flower): dab and pat. Warming oils (e.g. Wood Lock): rub in firmly. Zheng Gu Shui: let it dry fully—it can stain light sheets
5. Let it absorb. Avoid covering too tightly. Let it breathe.
6. Wash hands after use. Especially before touching your eyes or face.

When to Reapply

- Fresh pain or swelling: 2–3 times a day
- Chronic stiffness: morning & night
- Before movement: 20–30 mins ahead
- After movement: post-shower rub-in

Pro Tips

- Combine with stretching or acupressure
- Try after a warm towel compress
- Don't mix with other creams—it blocks absorption

TCM Insight

In Chinese medicine, timing matters. Warming liniments are best in the morning or before movement, especially in cold weather. Cooling liniments are ideal right after an injury or at night to settle inflammation.

✓ How to Combine Oils with Acupressure

1. Apply a small amount of your chosen liniment to the point
2. Use steady pressure with your thumb or knuckle
3. Hold or rub the point for 30–60 seconds
4. Breathe slowly and repeat on both sides if needed

👏 Easy Points to Try at Home			
Point	Location	Use it for	Pairs well with
LI4 – Hé Gǔ 合谷	Soft web between thumb and index finger	Headaches, neck tension	White Flower or Eagle Brand
GB20 – Fēng Chí 風池	Base of skull, in the hollows beside the spine	Neck pain, foggy head	Po Sum On or White Flower
ST36 – Zú Sān Lǐ 足三里	Four finger widths below kneecap, one finger out from shin	Fatigue, leg heaviness	Zheng Gu Shui
GB34 – Yáng Líng Quán 陽陵泉	Outside of lower leg, just below the knee	Stiff knees, muscle cramps	Wood Lock or Zheng Gu Shui
BL10 – Tiān Zhù 天柱	Two fingers out from spine at the top of the neck	Tension from desk work	Po Sum On

🔍 Tip:

You don't have to be exact—aim for the tender spot or hollow near each location.

📌 TCM Insight

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, pain is often caused by stuck Qi. Acupressure helps move it, while liniments help clear what's blocking it.

Before & After Movement

Liniments aren't just for injuries—they can help prepare your body for movement and ease recovery afterwards. Whether you're heading to the gym, going for a walk, working in the yard or on your feet all day, a bit of liniment can go a long way.

Before Movement (Warm-Up Support)

- Apply a warming liniment (like Wood Lock or Po Sum On) to joints or muscles that feel stiff
- Use a firm rub or light massage
- Follow with gentle stretching or mobility work
- Target areas prone to tightness: lower back, shoulders, knees, or ankles
- Let it absorb for 10–15 minutes before exercise or activity

After Movement (Cool-Down & Recovery)

- Apply a cooling or blood-moving liniment (like Zheng Gu Shui or White Flower) after a warm shower
- Focus on sore spots, tight bands, or overworked areas
- Combine with light pressure or rolling to help recovery
- Reapply at night if soreness sets in later
- Drink warm water or ginger tea to support circulation

 Routine Example		
Time	Action	Liniment
8:00 am	Pre-walk warm-up: apply to knees & low back	Po Sum On
9:30 am	After gardening: rub into shoulders & hands	Zheng Gu Shui
7:00 pm	Evening recovery: dab on neck + stretch	White Flower

TCM Tip

In Chinese medicine, movement keeps Qi flowing, but overuse can cause stagnation. Liniments help restore balance before pain sets in.

How Chinese Medicine Sees Pain

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), pain isn't just about muscles or joints. It's about stuckness—when something blocks the natural flow of Qi (氣) and Blood (血). Pain is often a sign that things aren't moving the way they should.

 Common Causes of Pain in TCM		
Pattern	Description	Liniment Support
Qi Stagnation	Dull, moving, or emotional pain	Po Sum On, White Flower
Blood Stasis	Sharp, fixed, stabbing pain	Zheng Gu Shui, Wood Lock
Cold-Damp	Heavy, stiff, worse in cold	Wood Lock, Po Sum On
Heat & Swelling	Red, inflamed, sharp pain	White Flower, Eagle Brand
Wind-Cold	Sudden neck or shoulder spasm	White Flower, Kwan Loong

TCM often uses metaphors—think of Qi as your body's internal traffic system. If there's a traffic jam, pain builds up.

How Liniments Help in TCM Terms

- Warming oils like Wood Lock move Qi, break up cold and relieve stiffness
- Cooling oils like Eagle Brand clear excess heat and inflammation
- Blood-moving formulas like Zheng Gu Shui disperse bruising and stasis
- Balancing oils like Po Sum On gently regulate flow without over-stimulating

Did You Know?

Many classic liniment formulas were developed by martial artists, bone setters, and battlefield doctors. They weren't just for sore muscles—they were part of a full healing system based on thousands of years of experience.

TCM Tip

Pain that gets better with warmth usually means cold or stagnation. Pain that improves with cold often means heat or inflammation. Choosing the right liniment depends on knowing the difference.

The Stories Behind the Oils

Each of these liniments comes with a story—a blend of tradition, family, and old-world herbal wisdom passed down over generations.

These aren't just products—they're part of Chinese medicine history.

● **Zheng Gu Shui 正骨水 – “Correct Bone Water”**

This famous formula comes from Chinese martial arts and trauma medicine. Originally used by bone setters, it was made to help heal bruises, fractures, and tendon injuries. You'll still find it in martial arts schools and hospitals across Asia.

● **Wood Lock Oil 活絡油 – “Circulation-Activating Oil”**

Created in Hong Kong in the 1960s by the Wong To Yick family, Wood Lock Oil combines traditional herbs with modern formulation. It became a trusted remedy for stiff joints and chronic muscle pain, especially in damp, cold climates.

● **Po Sum On Oil 保心安油 – “Protect-the-Heart-Calm”**

A gentler liniment, Po Sum On was developed by Chinese herbalists for headaches, tension, and stress-related muscle tightness. It's often used on the temples or chest, and the name reflects its original calming purpose—not just physical, but emotional.

● **White Flower Oil 白花油 – “White Flower Oil”**

Created in the 1920s by Gan Geok Eng in Singapore, this cooling liniment was named after his mother's favourite flower. It became a household staple across Asia. Today, it's still one of the most widely used oils for headaches, travel sickness, and neck tension.

● **Eagle Brand Oil 德國風油精 – “German Menthol Oil”**

Despite the name, this was developed in Singapore too—by a Chinese herbal company inspired by German-made menthol rubs. It's all about punchy peppermint, eucalyptus, and fast relief, and became popular for headaches and quick cooling effects.

● **Kwan Loong Oil 強龍油 – “Strong Dragon Oil”**

Named for its invigorating feel, Kwan Loong was originally produced for overworked labourers and athletes. It's now owned by Haw Par, the company behind Tiger Balm, and remains a trusted tool for cooling inflammation and calming nerve-related pain.

Dr Paul's Picks

What I use, when I use it, and why I always keep a few bottles around.

● Zheng Gu Shui

My go-to after long days lifting things in the yard or post-gardening aches. It soaks in fast and works deep.

When I use it: Old bruises, muscle knots, and when I've overdone it.

● Wood Lock Oil

I keep this near the heater in winter—it's great for cold joints and that deep, bone-level stiffness.

When I use it: Chilly mornings, low back pain, knees before exercise.

● Po Sum On

A gentle favourite. I use it when I want a milder touch—like temple tension or when I'm feeling a bit burnt out.

When I use it: End of the day, neck or jaw tension, emotional stress in the body.

● White Flower Oil

This one stays in my clinic drawer and travel bag. A few dabs and you feel instantly clearer.

When I use it: Headaches, sinus pressure, screen-fatigue days.

● Eagle Brand

Feels like a cold slap of clarity! Not subtle—but great after hot days, long drives or standing at events.

When I use it: Tension headaches, foot soreness, "I need to snap out of it" moments.

● Kwan Loong

I use this when I want something lighter. It absorbs quickly and doesn't leave residue—great on the go.

When I use it: Post-gym, after the beach, or on busy clinic days when I don't want to smell like liniment.

Your Notes

Tried an oil that helped? Felt better after a certain point or routine? Write it down here so you can remember what worked for you.

You can also note which oils you'd like to try next or any tips Paul gave you.

 Oils I've Tried

 What Helped Me Most

 Oils I Want to Try

 Paul's Tip or Advice

Thanks for Reading

I hope this guide helped you understand which liniments might suit your body best.

If you'd like to order a refill, get personalised advice, or explore more ways to support your recovery naturally:

 Scan the QR code below to visit my clinic page

 Order liniments online or reserve at reception

 Book an appointment or ask a question



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Seek advice from a qualified practitioner for ongoing or severe pain.