

HEALTH

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TCM

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Boning up

Traditional Chinese medicine is said to be beneficial during the long recovery period when bones are healing.

After setting or surgery, the bone site undergoes different processes such as inflammation, repair and, finally, remodelling to restore its original physical and mechanical properties.

Chinese bone-setting specialists use internal and

external remedies during treatment. Internal methods include decoctions, pills and medicinal wines, and external methods include massage, liniment, washing and steaming.

In the initial inflammatory stage of bone healing, a haematoma develops as debris is being removed and a callus forms over the fracture site. This usually causes pain and swelling. From a TCM viewpoint, the localised swelling causes meridian damage (the pathways that carry vital energy or *chi*) and leads to sluggish flow of blood and *chi*.

Herbs such as peach kernel, safflower, angelica, noto-ginseng or red peony root are used to activate the circulation and

remove blood stasis. If there's fever and abdominal distention, herbs for heat clearing and ridding the body of toxins are also applied. A light diet is prescribed, as greasy, raw, spicy and sour foods are believed to have a negative effect on healing. Soup made with rice beans and brown sugar may relieve swelling.

During the repair stage, the haematoma will be absorbed and new bone tissue starts to grow. TCM concentrates on further clearing blood stasis while promoting the regeneration of bone and soft tissues. Herbs such as Sichuan lovage, teasel root, sappan wood, drynaria and myrrh may be prescribed.

Bone remodelling begins at

about the fifth or sixth week after injury and can last up to two years. Soft bone tissue that has formed around the repair site will undergo restoration to its original shape and mechanical strength.

In TCM, the kidneys dominate the bones and produce bone marrow while the liver dominates the tendons. Both contribute to bone growth and reconstruction.

Treatment now involves fortifying the organs that facilitate the process. Herbs used include rehmannia root, eucommia bark, achyranthes root, dodder seed, wolfberry and Indian bread.

Due to long-term exhaustion and limited movements, people can also develop muscular atrophy and stiffness.

TCM advises food such as animal livers, kidneys, bones, maltose, red dates and wolfberries, all believed to invigorate the kidneys and replenish the bone marrow.

One recipe to enhance bone development is made from pork bones. Simmer pork bones (1kg, marinated in rice wine and salt for 15 minutes first), soybean (250g), fresh mushroom (80g), ginger (10g) with one litre of water for two hours. Add salt and green onion to taste and serve hot.

External remedies for bone healing include massage, qigong exercise, liniments and washing.

Before taking any medicine, see your TCM or general practitioner