

HEALTH

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TCM

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No butts about it

With Hong Kong now largely a smoke-free zone, those struggling to kick the nicotine habit may well be looking for help.

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) takes a holistic approach, first tackling the damage caused by tobacco tar accumulating along the airway passages, which inhibits the secretion glands' ability to self-clean and lubricate.

In TCM theory, the dryness creates a heat state inside the lung that weakens its command of the movement of *chi*, blood and the meridians.

Lung tonics – containing ophiopogonis (*mai dong*), peony

bark, tendrilleaf fritillary bulb and roots of fresh rhemannia, glehnia, figwort and white peony – are used to moisten the mouth and lungs, dissolve phlegm and detoxify. These are said to stop cravings and repair tissue.

However, the withdrawal of nicotine, which the body has worked around, temporarily clogs the movement of *chi*, while the accumulated toxic heat also flares up. The result is unpleasant symptoms such as nausea, palpitations, mood swings and restlessness.

Acupuncture is gaining ground as a therapy to give up smoking. It's believed to help eliminate nicotine cravings and also regulate the flow of *chi*. Proponents say this is because it releases endorphins, which induce a sense of calm and relaxation, and soothe anxiety, restlessness, stress and cravings.

TCM specialists don't recommend that acupuncture methods be used along with nicotine gums and patches.

If withdrawal symptoms become intolerable, physicians will prescribe decoctions to calm the mind, smooth the meridian flows and eliminate toxic heat. Common ingredients include bupleurum, shrivelled wheat, liquorice root and oyster shell.

Before you quit smoking, make sure your *chi* is flowing well. This can be achieved by doing yoga, tai chi or some other exercise on a regular basis.

Some people gain weight when trying to quit smoking, but TCM says this is due to a congestion of *chi*, possibly from unaddressed emotional, social or behavioural issues.

Before taking any medicine, see your TCM or medical practitioner