

HEALTH

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TCM

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Well healed

When seeing a traditional Chinese medicine doctor, there are ways to ensure an accurate diagnosis.

The diagnostic technique in TCM – referred to as the four examinations – entailing looking, listening and smelling, touching, and history-gathering.

These techniques are critical for the practitioner to recognise disharmony or a syndrome. Following simple steps before going to the clinic will help the

doctor gather the information needed for an accurate diagnosis.

During the observation part of the examination, it's important not to disturb any coating that may be present on the tongue and not to wear makeup that may alter the skin's appearance.

A white, lustreless face can indicate a blood deficiency. However, if blush is applied, a TCM practitioner may have difficulty identifying such a condition or may misdiagnose this as excessive heat.

Even lipstick should be avoided as lip colour provides clues to a person's health.

Brushing teeth and the tongue is a daily part of most people's hygiene routine. However, the

coating on the tongue, particularly in the morning, has great significance in traditional Chinese medicine and shouldn't be scraped away before examination.

A thick, white coating on the tongue may mean there's accumulation of a phlegm evil or dampness evil, whereas a pale tongue with teeth marks may point to deficient spleen syndrome.

Avoid coffee, tea and canned juices such as orange and grape because they can stain the tongue.

During the listening and smelling part of the examination, a person's voice, respiratory pattern and sweat smell are also important. A weak, low voice with shortness of breath may mean the

body tends to be a deficient type, whereas a coarse voice may signify an excess of "disease" evils.

Also, be sure to mention if your sweat has a certain smell because this will help your TCM practitioner differentiate your body type.

During the history-gathering phase of the examination, vague descriptions about a problem can leave out vital information.

Specific information about where exactly the pain occurs, how the pain feels, how long the pain lasts, what brings it on and what lessens the pain will offer significant clues.

Describing associated symptoms or a family history of abdominal problems will allow a

TCM practitioner or western doctor to more accurately pinpoint the cause of the problem and provide treatment.

Last, but not least, don't rush the pulse-taking or touching part of the examination.

The pulse is another important information source and its rate and quality are routinely assessed when making a disharmony pattern diagnosis.

It's preferable to reach the clinic five to 15 minutes before the appointed time to avoid a rapid and bounding pulse that may disguise your real pulse type.

Consult your TCM or medical practitioner before taking any medicines.