

HEALTH

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TCM

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Preventative cures

When a Chinese medical practitioner prescribes a herbal decoction, you might be surprised by how many herbs are mixed together to create it. But these formulas are chosen carefully for special therapeutic effects.

There are eight fundamental strategies in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) treatments and these dictate the choice of herbs. Diaphoresis, emesis, purgation,

mediation, warming, clearing, resolving and tonifying are the most commonly employed methods. They were first summarised in *Yixue Xinwu* (Medicine Comprehended) written by Cheng Zhongling in 1732.

TCM treatments are aimed at expelling pathogens and restoring the body's internal balance so it can effectively resist disease.

That's why TCM is often thought of as preventative medicine. This doesn't mean all treatments are gentle. Anyone who has willingly experienced sweating, diarrhoea and vomiting as a way to rebalance their body will tell you that. But even if the treatment isn't always gentle, the effects – such as

feeling and becoming healthy – are why people go back to their TCM practitioner.

Diaphoresis or sweating regulates *chi* movements so pores open and pathogens on the body's surface are released with the sweat. It's often used in treating skin rashes and the common cold. Ephedra, or *ma huang* (right), is typically used in prescriptions for this effect.

Emesis gets rid of phlegm, stagnant food or toxic substances from the mouth. It may be used to treat throat, chest or stomach problems. Melon stalks are prescribed for this.

Purgation induces bowel movements to relax the intestines and expel excessive pathogens that have accumulated. Purgation may be used to treat constipation, high fevers and swelling of the legs and feet. Chinese rhubarb, or *da huang*, is used to clear heat and promote bowel movements.

Mediation or harmonisation regulates organ function, so that physical functioning is modified to a new level. This builds up the body's resistance and expels pathogens. This method is typically used to treat menstrual, liver and spleen dysfunctions. Chinese thorowax root and white peony root are two herbs that harmonise the spleen and liver.

The warming method supports the interior of the body or unblocks meridians to dispel coldness and replenish the body's yang aspect.

It's used for joint pain caused by the cold and to restore organ functioning after collapse. Processed monkshood daughter

root can warm the yang aspects of the heart and kidney.

The clearing method clears heat and fire and drains toxicity by using herbs with cold properties. According to TCM, fever-like illnesses can be due to heat/fire evils accumulating within the *chi*, blood or other organs. There are strict rules for herb application in these instances.

The resolving method is used for clearing excessive accumulation of unhealthy evils due to stagnation of *chi* and blood, accumulation of unhealthy phlegm or from retained food or fluids.

This may be used to treat indigestion, parasite infections

and in some types of goitre and tangible lumps. Hawthorn can help clear indigestion.

Tonification nourishes, enriches and replenishes a weakness or deficiency. Ginseng is considered a tonifying herb for replenishing *chi*.

Although these are the major TCM treatments, there are other options, such as acupuncture, moxibustion and *qi gong* that produce equally good effects. TCM practitioners will often combine therapies to get a better outcome.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner