

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Bath time

Herbal baths aren't just a soothing way to rejuvenate a tired body and mind. In traditional Chinese medicine, they're seen as a tool for treating illness or disease.

However, herbal baths have had some bad press recently, after man died in March while soaking in a herbal solution at a Chinese medicine clinic in Sha Tin.

A TCM practitioner commenting on the case said the herbal soaking treatment might have increased blood circulation, which can be dangerous for people with heart conditions. Good ventilation was also necessary in the treatment room and the procedure shouldn't be done on an empty stomach.

In China, early in the Zhou dynasty (about 1100-221 BC), people began using Eupatorium (*pei lan*) in baths to expel body odour. This fragrant herb is a common ingredient used to relieve "summer heat" symptoms and promote appetite.

Herbal baths are widely used as a healing therapy for conditions such as fever, fungus infections, skin sores, wounds, pain, arthritis, and itchiness, as

well as a beauty treatment. To soak in a herbal bath, mix an infusion or decoction, or steep a large gauze bag stuffed with ground herbs.

When preparing the decoction, soak the herbal ingredients for 20 minutes first and then boil for 30 minutes. It's said that the same pack of herbs can be decocted three times.

Water temperature should be kept about 38 degrees Celsius. Rub your skin lightly and soak in the bath for no longer than 30 minutes. Afterwards, rest for a further 30 minutes and drink water to replenish lost body fluid.

For healthy skin, include mung bean, lily bud and borneol (10g each), talc, monkshood, dahurian angelica root, sandalwood and resin (30g each). Grind all the ingredients and pour directly into warm water (about 38 degrees). Soak for 30 minutes.

For those who are overweight: prepare a decoction with dried winter melon peel and poria (300g each), papaya, perilla leaf and dried tangerine peel (100g each). Water temperature should be 39-42 degrees. Soak for 10 minutes, then leave the bath water to cool down for three to five minutes. Repeat four times. A bath twice a day is recommended.

Herbal baths aren't suitable for children, the elderly or those suffering from serious illness.

*Before taking medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner*