

HEALTH

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TCM

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Drink to health

Southern China is in a subtropical zone whose high temperatures and humidity cause bacterial and fungal growth. According to traditional Chinese medicine, hot and wet weather makes it easy for exogenous heat and dampness evils to attack the body. They consume *chi* (vital energy), impair body fluids and cause a series of health problems.

Those suffering from damp-heat evils can experience fever, irritability, thirst, heaviness of the limbs, chest tightness, nausea and diarrhoea. When these evils

attack different parts of the body, they cause specific syndromes.

Herbal beverages are seen as an ideal way to prevent heat and dampness conditions as they clear the heat and dampness, replenish *chi* and supply fluids.

They're referred to as cooling teas, have a bitter flavour and are dark brown.

In ancient times, these drinks were effective and affordable remedies for people to treat and prevent disease. They were also combined with local ingredients and brewed to individual tastes.

Initially, people would buy the herbal ingredients and prepare the remedies at home, until herbal shops began to provide ready-made forms for convenience. In Hong Kong, these herbal beverages are often sold by the bowl at herbal tea shop counters.

There are no standard

prescriptions, and many herbal shops keep their recipes secret. Ingredients in the teas may alter depending on the time of year.

Today, these traditional teas are still popular folk remedies. They're not only able to protect against climatic influences, but

also can relieve ailments caused by the stressful urban lifestyle.

Some common teas found in Hong Kong include:

Five Flowers, which is said to clear heat and expel dampness and is anti-inflammatory, helping to alleviate symptoms such as fatigue, sore throat, indigestion, poor appetite, insomnia and urinary problems.

Canton love-pes vine, which is said to relieve fatigue, irritability, chest fullness and indigestion. It is also consumed to prevent hepatitis and urinary stones.

Chrysanthemum is suitable for those people who always feel thirsty and have a bitter taste in the mouth, or those with blurred vision, sore throat, hoarseness, dark yellow urine or a headache due to wind evils attacking the head region.

Sugar cane and lalang grass rhizoma, which is said to help

replenish body fluids and clear dryness and heat symptoms such as thirst, mouth sores, a dry throat, bad breath, crusty lips and nasal bleeding.

Flu tea is a very bitter tea recommended when you have the early symptoms of cold or influenza such as fatigue, a sense of general weakness and a slightly runny nose.

Twenty-four flavours is also a bitter tea used to treat excessive fire in the body and is helpful to many other ailments too. It's said to help alleviate sore throat, fever, the common cold and flu, and skin problems.

The drinks provided by herbal shops may target more specific conditions, as each shop has its own unique formulation.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner