

## HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz  
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

## TCM: Running battle

Diarrhoea is one of many symptoms of a gastrointestinal disorder. Acute diarrhoea often results from contaminated drinking water, undercooked food or inadequate kitchen hygiene. Chronic diarrhoea may arise from conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome or chronic intestinal inflammation (for example, ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease).

It is important to seek immediate medical attention if the condition persists as sufferers can quickly become dehydrated.

The large intestine is directly responsible for defecation, but stool formation and excretion is supported by every part of the internal system. The spleen and stomach control reception of water and food, digesting and transforming them into nutrients. The kidneys' propelling and warming capacities enhance spleen, stomach and intestinal functions. The liver regulates *qi* movement, which is crucial to spleen health.

In the treatment of diarrhoea, TCM fights against the entry of external pathogens, but also aims at restoring the functions of these organs to normal levels. Physicians pay special attention to details such as stool consistency and the physical sensations that accompany defecation, as well as overall health, and then formulate a remedy accordingly. This provides a comprehensive strategy to overcome the internal disharmony.

Acute watery diarrhoea may be marked by abdominal pain, loud intestinal sounds and nausea, and also accompanied by fever, a runny nose, headache or body aches. TCM works to expel pathogens from the surface of the body in these cases, using herbs such as agastache, perilla leaf and dahurian Angelica root.

To treat acute, forceful diarrhoea consisting of dark-yellowish stools, accompanied by a burning sensation, thirst, scant urine and a yellow-coated tongue, TCM practitioners will aim to expel pathogens accumulated in the intestines using kudzu root, baical skullcap root and golden thread rhizome in their remedy.

Indigestion can cause rotten, foul-smelling diarrhoea accompanied by vomiting, bloating, acid belching and a thick, greasy tongue coating. Remedies that focus on promoting proper digestion include hawthorn fruit, medicated leaven and radish seed.

If diarrhoea is associated with emotional stress, and there are accompanying signs such as tightness in the chest, belching, poor appetite, and frequent passing of wind, TCM practitioners will aim to soothe the liver and invigorate the spleen. A formula such as the Essential Formula for Diarrhoea with Pain (*Tong Xie Yao Fang*) will be used.

Chronic loose stools are usually caused by underlying

disharmonies – often spleen and stomach deficiencies aggravated by eating greasy or fatty foods. Other symptoms include bloating, fatigue, poor appetite and paleness. Ginseng Poria Atractylode (*Shen Ling Bai Zhu Pian*) pills offer an effective remedy to reinforce the spleen and stomach functions and ease the diarrhoea.

Chronic persistent diarrhoea can be caused by both spleen and kidney deficiencies. Individuals may typically have diarrhoea early in the morning after an episode of colic around the navel. Other symptoms can include fatigue, limb coldness, weakness in the lumbar spine and knees, profuse clear urine or frequent urination at night. TCM holds that warming herbs should be used to invigorate the organs, such as ginseng, fried ginger and largehead atractylodes rhizome.

With all types of diarrhoea, it is important to drink sufficient liquid to avoid dehydration. Be cautious in using anti-diarrhoea medications as they may sometimes prevent the body from eliminating bacteria or toxins, thus worsening the condition.

**Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings ([icm.com.hk](http://icm.com.hk)). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner.**