

HEALTH

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TCM

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Not to be sniffed at

A trip to the herbalist might be just the trick to hasten recovery from the common cold. Chinese medicine's 2,000-year-old history has presented much evidence to show it can work.

Chris Poon is a believer when it comes to certain illnesses. A few months ago, the Hong Kong secretary felt a cold coming on. She was lightheaded and weak for two days, developed a high fever and then – \$250 later – was diagnosed with a viral infection. The doctor prescribed medication for her fever and told her to rest.

But her symptoms worsened, with persistent sweating, chills and drowsiness, and Poon feared she'd have to cancel a long-planned holiday to Thailand.

A friend suggested she visit Lee Ding-hing, a TCM practitioner in Wan Chai. Lee's herbal shop has a traditional set-up: two glass display

counters along the sides, with the practitioner and his patients at a consulting table in the centre.

Along one side are tall glass jars filled with expensive herbs. Below them are rows of well-worn drawers containing more common varieties.

Lee asked Poon about her symptoms, her appetite, bowel patterns, sleep and temperature. He looked closely at her face, checked her tongue and took her pulse for several minutes. He drafted a herbal prescription with more than 10 ingredients and told her she'd be relieved of the cold after two doses.

Poon paid \$190 – slightly more than the average of \$120 for two days of treatment.

Back at home, she put the concoction – which usually includes herbs such as ephedra, cinnamon twig, apricot kernel, liquorice, honeysuckle flower, peppermint and chrysanthemum – in a ceramic pot with 1.25 litres of water, and brought it to a boil. She let it simmer until the liquid boiled down to about 250ml. This took about 35 minutes.

The dark brown mixture was thick and bitter, which is usual for medicinal decoctions. Poon drank

it down. After resting for a couple of hours, she found that she no longer had a fever, the sweating had stopped, the headache had vanished, and her stuffy nose was clear. Her strength returned. Her body felt refreshed.

The next day, Poon resumed her normal routine. She took the second dose of medicine that night, and then left for Thailand on her holiday.

Consult your TCM or medical practitioner before taking any medicines