

HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

TCM: Chill factors

Cold weather "coldness" is an important health concept in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which regards it as an evil that disturbs the functioning of the body. TCM says that cold foods upset digestion, cold drinks make menstruation painful, cold winds induce headaches, cold damp environments cause joint pain, and that cold can enter through the belly button to cause diarrhoea.

Internal weakness can lead to cold manifestations. For example, limb coldness indicates that the body lacks energy to aid peripheral circulation. For those who find it difficult to keep their limbs warm, TCM advises taking measures to reduce the risk of developing skin cuts, frostbite or other vascular problems during winter. According to TCM theory, limb coldness is a sign of yang deficiency which is associated with many conditions. TCM management aims to resolve the underlying disharmonies.

The spleen is the source of qi and blood production, and a strong spleen ensures that proper qi and blood supply reach the extremities. People who have excessive coldness in the spleen also tend to suffer from fatigue, paleness, loose bowels and digestive problems. Physicians use warming ingredients such as dried ginger, evodia fruits, lesser galangal rhizome, anise pepper and maltose to make the remedies.

In some individuals cold limbs are due to vascular problems. TCM views the condition as arising from excessive

coldness in the meridians. These types of disharmonies also tend to have symptoms such as paleness, dizziness, numbness, generalised pain or menstrual problems. Remedies focus on increasing the nourishing effect of the blood using herbs such as angelica root, processed rhemannia rhizome and cistanche. Expelling the coldness in the meridians is done by using herbs such as cassia bark, charred ginger, cassia twig and ephedra.

For chronic sufferers and the elderly, it may be necessary to invigorate the kidney system as well. This reinforcement of the kidneys also helps to improve urinary function, strengthen the lumbar spine and joints, and overall physical health. Beneficial herbs for this include morinda root, epimedium, dodder seed and cordyceps.

Dietary therapy becomes particularly important during winter. Foods that provide warmth include mutton, beef, shrimps, eels, leeks, sweet potato, pumpkin, carrots, mushrooms, nuts, glutinous rice, ginger, brown sugar and red wine. A traditional congee made with seedless red dates (10 pieces) and glutinous rice (200g) is a good choice for breakfast, while meat stews are good for lunch and dinner. When various cold manifestations have developed, physicians often recommend a soup made with angelica root (20g), fresh ginger (10 slices), mutton (240g) and rice wine (100ml).

Every night before sleeping, soak your feet in warm water to help circulation in the meridians and expel the coldness. For skin cuts or frostbite, an infusion made with baical skullcap root (9g), golden thread rhizome (9g), sopora root (9g) and rhemannia root (15g) can be used for washing and soaking. This helps to relieve local swelling, pain and tingling.

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