

HEALTH

Edited by Suzanne Harrison suzanne.harrison@scmp.com

TCM

Rose Tse and
Angela Collingwood
info@shen-nong.com

Dehydration

Summer in Hong Kong poses a greater risk of dehydration, especially when people are outdoors.

This can lead to a substantial amount of body fluid loss and possible symptoms of mild dehydration, such as increased thirst, decreased urine production, fatigue and a light headache.

But there are some simple foods and drinks recommended by Chinese medical practitioners that can counteract this.

Maintaining a proper body-fluids balance is important in traditional Chinese medicine. Other than blood, body fluids in TCM mean all liquid forms, including sweat, tears and fluids contained in the organs, tissues and intestines.

In newborns, water accounts for 75 to 80 per cent of body weight. This percentage declines with age, and by 60, water represents about 50 per cent of total body weight. Although this is a natural process of ageing, having sufficient water content can help turn back the clock and maintain a youthful appearance.

Body fluids provide moisture and nourishment to the tissues. They make up an important yin component in the body, acting as fuels and also lubricants for organ function.

Apart from an acute type of dehydration, TCM is also concerned when there's a chronic or continual depletion of body fluids.

Unhealthy lifestyles such as increased stress, not getting enough sleep, or consuming too much spicy and greasy foods can overload the body and create internal heat. This heat dries up body fluids and shifts the normal yin-yang balance.

General symptoms are a dry mouth, lips and throat. These are early signs that body fluids are being consumed at a rate at which the body can't easily replenish them.

Additional symptoms of a hoarse voice and bloodshot eyes may indicate that heat is building up within the body.

For most people, these mild signs aren't easily recognised. However, Chinese medicine practitioners rely on such early warning signs to assess body fluid balance. When a mild yin deficiency has led to heat inside the body, body fluids become phlegm-like.

The body needs to be stimulated to produce more fluids in order to clear the heat and lessen the phlegm-like thickness.

There are foods that should be eaten to maintain fluid balance. It's not just a matter of drinking more liquids.

Tomatoes, lotus root, pak choi, wild rice stem, apples, pineapple, plums, apricots, peaches, water chestnuts, sugar cane, starfruit, loquat fruit and citrus fruits may be consumed. These foods are said to stimulate

the body to produce more fluids to help restore the yin-yang balance.

One particular Chinese drink that supports good fluid balance is made from chestnuts, green sugar cane, carrot and *rhizoma imperatae* (commonly known as bai mao gen).

This sweet drink is believed to facilitate water absorption, and promote lung dissemination of body fluids, as well as facilitate the excretion of urine. The ready-made drink is easily found in herbal teashops or fruit juice stalls.

Rose Tse and Angela Collingwood are editors for Shen-Nong, a subsidiary of Integrated Chinese Medicine. Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or general practitioner