



SHANDE TCM

Everyday Symptoms: When to Self-Care and When to Get Checked

Fever, sore throat, diarrhoea, reflux, cough and practical medical red flags

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How to use this guide

This guide groups related everyday concerns so you can ask better questions, observe changes that actually matter and know when ordinary self-care may be reasonable versus when conventional medical assessment should come first. TCM terminology is kept in its traditional context rather than presented as biomedical diagnosis.

Safety principle

Severe, persistent, rapidly worsening symptoms or clear red flags should be medically assessed first. Call 995 for life-threatening emergencies.

CHAPTER 01

Fever in Adults: Hydration, Monitoring and When TCM Should Wait

A practical guide to adult fever, fluids, temperature tracking, medicines, TCM limits and the symptoms that require medical care.



Key points

- Fever is a sign, not a diagnosis, and can occur with many infections and inflammatory illnesses.
- Hydration and rest can help comfort, but persistent or severe fever still needs proper medical assessment.
- Breathing difficulty, confusion, collapse, severe dehydration or rapidly worsening illness are reasons for urgent care.

Measure rather than guess

If you feel feverish, use a thermometer when available and note the actual temperature, how long it has lasted and what other symptoms are present. Chills or feeling hot alone do not tell you the cause.

Fluid intake matters

Fever can increase fluid needs, and dehydration becomes more likely when there is vomiting, diarrhoea or poor intake. Small frequent drinks may be easier to tolerate. People with heart or kidney conditions may need individual fluid advice.

Do not hide serious symptoms with a “heat-clearing” label

TCM may describe fever-related patterns using traditional terms, but those terms should not delay testing or medical care when infection is possible. Antibiotics are not appropriate for every fever, but neither should a serious bacterial infection be missed.

Medicines need ordinary safety rules

If using fever medicines, follow the product label or medical advice and avoid accidentally doubling ingredients across combination cold products. Children, pregnancy, liver or kidney disease and other situations need additional caution.

Watch the person, not only the number

How someone is breathing, drinking, urinating, thinking and moving can be more important than one temperature reading. A person who is becoming confused, very weak, breathless or unable to keep fluids down needs assessment.

Know when urgent care is appropriate

Call 995 for life-threatening emergencies such as severe breathing difficulty, loss of consciousness or seizures. Seek medical review for persistent high fever, severe dehydration, chest pain, severe headache with neck stiffness, significant rash or rapidly worsening symptoms.

CHAPTER 02

Sore Throat in Singapore: Self-Care, TCM Support and When to See a Doctor

A straightforward guide to sore throat, hydration, voice rest, infection warning signs, TCM support and when medical review comes first.

Key points

- Most sore throats are not dangerous, but difficulty breathing or swallowing and significant swelling need urgent care.
- Hydration, avoiding smoke and resting the voice can help comfort while the cause settles or is assessed.
- TCM support should not delay testing or treatment when symptoms suggest a significant infection.

Describe the throat problem

Notice whether the main issue is scratchiness, sharp pain, hoarseness, dryness, difficulty swallowing or a feeling of swelling. Record fever, cough, runny nose, rash, neck swelling, reflux symptoms and how long it has lasted.

Simple comfort measures are reasonable

Warm or cool fluids, adequate hydration, avoiding smoke and irritants, and resting the voice can help. There is no need to force extremely hot drinks or strong herbal mixtures onto an already irritated throat.

Think beyond “heatiness”

A sore throat can occur with viral infections, bacterial infections, allergies, postnasal drip, reflux, dry air and voice strain. TCM may describe a traditional pattern, but that does not replace diagnosing a persistent or severe problem.

Medicines and herbs can overlap

If you use lozenges, pain relievers, cold medicines or herbal products, keep track of ingredients and doses. Tell a practitioner about allergies, pregnancy and regular medicines.

Watch swallowing and breathing

Seek urgent help for difficulty breathing, drooling or inability to swallow fluids, rapidly increasing neck or throat swelling, severe dehydration, or a person who looks seriously unwell.

Get checked when the pattern is not settling

Medical review is sensible for persistent severe pain, repeated episodes, high fever, significant pus or swelling, rash, dehydration, symptoms lasting longer than expected or when you are immunocompromised.

CHAPTER 03

Diarrhoea: Hydration, Food Choices, TCM and Red Flags

A practical guide to diarrhoea, fluids, eating, medicine safety and the warning signs that should not be managed as a simple “digestive imbalance”.



Key points

- The main immediate risk with frequent diarrhoea is dehydration, especially in children, older adults and people who are already unwell.
- Blood in stool, severe abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, high fever or marked weakness needs medical review.
- TCM or food therapy should not delay investigation when symptoms are severe, persistent or recurring.

Count the practical things

Notice how often stools occur, whether they are watery, whether there is blood or black stool, and whether there is fever, vomiting, travel, sick contacts or recent antibiotics. These details are more useful than simply saying the stomach is “weak”.

Hydration comes first

Small frequent drinks may be easier to tolerate than large amounts at once. Oral rehydration solutions can be useful when fluid and salts are being lost. People with significant heart or kidney disease should follow personalised fluid advice.

Keep food simple without starving

When appetite returns, ordinary foods that are easy to tolerate are reasonable. There is usually no need to fast for long periods or use very restrictive “detox” diets. Avoid alcohol and foods that clearly worsen symptoms while the gut settles.

Be cautious with medicines

Some anti-diarrhoeal medicines are not suitable in certain infections or when there is blood in stool or high fever. Check with a pharmacist or doctor when unsure, especially for children, pregnancy, older adults or people with chronic illness.

TCM should stay complementary

A practitioner may discuss traditional digestive patterns, herbs or acupuncture. If diarrhoea is severe, recurring, associated with weight loss, bleeding or dehydration, medical diagnosis is more important than trying repeated symptom-control treatments.

Know dehydration and emergency warning signs

Seek medical review for very little urine, severe thirst, dizziness, persistent vomiting, blood or black stool, high fever, severe abdominal pain, marked weakness or symptoms that are not improving. Call 995 for life-threatening collapse or severe deterioration.

CHAPTER 04

Heartburn and Reflux: Meal Timing, Triggers, TCM and When to Get Checked

A practical Singapore guide to reflux, late meals, common triggers, TCM conversations and warning symptoms that need medical review.

Key points

- Reflux can be affected by meal size, timing, alcohol, weight, medicines and individual triggers.
- Frequent heartburn should not be assumed to be simple “heat” or “weak digestion”.
- Difficulty swallowing, bleeding, persistent vomiting, weight loss or chest pain needs medical assessment.

Recognise the common pattern

Reflux can feel like burning behind the breastbone, sour fluid coming up, belching, throat irritation or symptoms that worsen after meals or when lying down. Keep in mind that chest discomfort has many causes, some of which are urgent.

Late dinners are a practical Singapore issue

Work schedules, supper and large late meals can make reflux more likely for some people. Try allowing more time between a large meal and lying down, and notice whether meal size matters more than specific “forbidden” foods.

Find your real triggers

Common triggers include alcohol, very large meals, high-fat foods, chocolate, caffeine and spicy foods, but not everyone reacts to the same things. A short food-and-symptom diary is more useful than eliminating a long list without evidence.

TCM can discuss patterns without replacing investigation

A TCM practitioner may use traditional terms such as stomach heat, qi rebellion or deficiency. Those concepts can guide traditional treatment, but they do not rule out reflux disease,

ulcers, medication effects or other conditions.

Medicines and supplements matter

Some medicines can affect the stomach or oesophagus. Bring a full medicine and supplement list if symptoms are frequent. Do not stop prescribed medicines without discussing alternatives with the prescriber.

Know the warning symptoms

Seek medical review for difficulty or pain when swallowing, vomiting blood, black stool, unexplained weight loss, persistent vomiting, severe recurrent symptoms or chest pain. Sudden severe chest pain with sweating, breathlessness or collapse is an emergency.

CHAPTER 05

Cough in Singapore: When Self-Care Is Enough and When to Get Checked

A practical guide to common cough patterns, useful home observations and the signs that deserve medical review.



Key points

- Most short-lived coughs improve with time, but duration and accompanying symptoms matter.
- Breathlessness, chest pain, blood, high fever or significant worsening deserve medical attention.
- TCM may be discussed as complementary care only after important medical causes are considered.

Start by describing the cough, not naming it

A cough can be dry, tickly, wet, phlegmy, mainly at night, worse after meals, triggered by air-conditioning or associated with a runny nose. Those details are more useful than assuming one cause. In Singapore, viral infections, allergic rhinitis and postnasal drip are common possibilities, but asthma, reflux, medicines and other conditions can also contribute.

Duration changes the conversation

A cough that is gradually improving after a simple respiratory infection is different from one that keeps returning or does not settle. HealthHub advises medical review when a cough fails to improve with self-treatment, becomes worse or persists for a prolonged period. A clinician can listen to the chest, review medicines and decide whether further assessment is needed.

Know the warning signs

Seek medical care promptly for difficulty breathing, wheezing with distress, chest pain, coughing blood, pink frothy phlegm, significant weight loss, high fever, marked weakness or rapidly worsening symptoms. People with asthma, COPD, heart disease, immune suppression or other important medical conditions should have a lower threshold for review.

What you can observe at home

Note when the cough happens, whether there is phlegm, fever, nasal blockage, heartburn, shortness of breath or a new medicine. Hydration may help if you are not on fluid restriction. Avoid smoke and obvious irritants. A simple symptom diary can make a consultation much more productive.

Where TCM may fit

A TCM consultation may explore sleep, appetite, throat comfort, digestion and other symptoms through a traditional framework. That discussion should not delay medical assessment of persistent or concerning cough. Tell the TCM practitioner about inhalers, medicines, allergies, pregnancy and any known respiratory diagnosis.

CHAPTER 06

Headaches: A TCM-Informed Guide With Safety Red Flags First

A straightforward overview of preparation, common sensations, hygiene and when to tell your practitioner about medical conditions.

Key points

- A new, sudden or unusually severe headache needs careful assessment.
- Track location, duration, triggers, sleep, hydration, vision and other symptoms.
- TCM support should not delay urgent evaluation when neurological or systemic warning signs are present.

Describe the headache before naming it

“Headache” covers many experiences: pressure, throbbing, tightness, one-sided pain, pain behind the eyes or discomfort linked with the neck. Note when it started, how long it lasts, what makes it better or worse, and whether you also have nausea, visual changes, fever, injury or neurological symptoms.

Everyday contributors are worth checking

Poor sleep, dehydration, skipped meals, long screen sessions, stress, alcohol and prolonged neck tension can all be relevant. This does not mean they explain every headache, but they are useful details to bring to both a doctor and a TCM practitioner.

How a TCM consultation may differ

A TCM practitioner may ask about the headache together with sleep, digestion, stress, menstrual history where relevant and other whole-body observations. Traditional pattern terminology describes the TCM framework; it should not be treated as proof of a biomedical cause.

What support may involve

Depending on assessment and suitability, a practitioner may discuss acupuncture, Tuina or other TCM approaches. Any treatment plan should account for your medical history, medicines, pregnancy status and previous diagnoses. Do not stop prescribed medicines without discussing it with the prescriber.

Red flags come first

Seek urgent medical help for a sudden “worst ever” headache, headache after significant injury, new weakness or numbness, confusion, fainting, seizures, severe neck stiffness with fever, or other rapidly worsening symptoms. Call 995 in Singapore for emergencies.

Bring a useful pain story

Note when the pain began, whether there was an injury, where it travels, what movements change it, and whether there is weakness, numbness, swelling, fever or night pain. Ask what the proposed treatment is trying to change, what movement is safe, what would count as worsening, and which symptoms mean you should stop complementary care and seek medical assessment.

Observe function, not just a pain number

A pain score can change from hour to hour, so also track function: Can you turn your head, climb stairs, sit through a meeting, sleep or carry groceries more comfortably? Note whether symptoms spread or neurological changes appear. Functional goals make it easier to judge whether an approach is helping and reduce the temptation to continue treatment simply because the pain number occasionally fluctuates.

Practical checklist

Is the problem getting worse or clearly affecting daily function?

Are there breathing, consciousness, bleeding, dehydration or neurological red flags that should come first?

What prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, supplements or TCM products are already being used?

If an approach is tried, when will progress be reviewed?

What change would mean self-care should stop and professional assessment should come first?

References & further reading

Health Sciences Authority (HSA): Chinese proprietary medicines and complementary health product safety. Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF): Emergency Medical Services and guidance on when to call 995.