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Digestive Health, Food & Everyday Wellness

Bloating, bowel habits, meals and TCM-informed care

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This guide is designed to be read, saved and shared. It uses practical language, keeps TCM terminology in context and clearly separates general education from symptoms that need medical assessment.

Before you begin

Digestive symptoms are common, but they are not all the same. Bloating, reflux, constipation, meal timing, hydration, medicines and stress can overlap in different ways. This guide helps you organise what you notice, make practical changes, use traditional food ideas sensibly and recognise when persistent symptoms deserve medical review.

What this book is designed to do

A practical reading approach

- Explain the topic in plain language without turning TCM terminology into a biomedical diagnosis.
- Help you notice useful patterns: timing, triggers, medicines, habits, associated symptoms and change over time.
- Show where everyday self-care may be reasonable and where medical review should come first.
- Make consultation more useful by helping you arrive with clearer information and questions.

A safety note

Emergency or red-flag symptoms come before complementary care. Tell healthcare professionals about prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, herbs, supplements, pregnancy, allergies and important chronic conditions.

CHAPTER 01

Digestive Comfort in Singapore: Hawker Food, Late Meals and TCM Habits



A practical guide to enjoying Singapore food while noticing meal size, spice, oils, late eating and personal triggers through a TCM-informed lens.

Key points

- You do not need a “perfect TCM diet” to eat sensibly.
- Meal size and timing may matter as much as individual ingredients.
- Persistent symptoms should not be blamed on one food without assessment.

Keep food culture, lose the guilt

Singapore food is varied, social and enjoyable. A health plan that requires avoiding every hawker meal is unlikely to last. Instead, notice which combinations consistently leave you uncomfortable and make small adjustments that fit real life.

Portion and timing can matter

Large late-night meals can feel heavy even when the food itself is not “bad”. If reflux, bloating or poor sleep follows supper, reducing the portion or moving the meal earlier may be more useful than searching for a special herb to cancel it out.

TCM food language is best used flexibly

Traditional food therapy may describe foods as warming, cooling, drying or nourishing. These ideas can guide variety and meal choices, but they should not become rigid rules or be confused with the literal temperature or nutritional composition of a food.

Hydration is easy to overlook

Hot weather and busy days can make fluid intake irregular. Water needs vary with activity, weather and health conditions. People with heart, kidney or other conditions may have specific fluid advice and should follow their medical plan.

If symptoms keep returning, investigate

Recurring reflux, pain, diarrhoea, constipation, unexplained weight change or blood in stool deserves medical review. An eating pattern can influence symptoms, but persistent problems should not be assumed to be only “heatiness” or “weak digestion”.

Turn symptoms into a useful pattern

For one week, note meal timing, portion size, bowel pattern, bloating or reflux, major trigger foods, medicines and stress. The aim is not to build a long forbidden-food list. Ask whether the pattern suggests a need for medical investigation, which simple habit changes are worth testing first, and how any herbal or dietary recommendation fits with your existing health conditions.

Test habits one at a time

If you suspect food or routine is contributing, avoid changing everything at once. Start with meal timing, portion size, hydration or one obvious trigger and observe for a reasonable period. Over-restriction can make eating stressful and nutritionally poor. If symptoms remain persistent despite simple changes, the next useful step is assessment rather than an ever-growing list of forbidden foods.

CHAPTER 02

Bloating and Indigestion: A TCM Perspective With Practical Limits

Bloating is common but not always “just digestion”. Learn what to observe, how meal patterns matter and when persistent symptoms need medical review.

Key points

- Bloating can be influenced by meal size, speed, constipation, food intolerance and many medical conditions.
- TCM pattern language should not replace investigation of persistent symptoms.
- Unexplained weight loss, bleeding or severe pain needs medical assessment.

Bloating is a description, not a diagnosis

Feeling full, tight or gassy after eating can happen for many reasons. Large meals, eating quickly, fizzy drinks, constipation, certain carbohydrates and stress may contribute. Persistent bloating can also occur with medical conditions, so it should not automatically be labelled “weak digestion” or “dampness”.

What a TCM consultation may ask

A practitioner may ask whether symptoms are worse after specific foods, whether you feel cold or hot, how your appetite and bowel habits are, and whether discomfort improves with warmth, movement or passing gas. These observations are used within TCM pattern assessment.

Simple meal habits can be surprisingly useful

Try smaller portions if very large meals trigger symptoms, eat more slowly and notice whether certain foods repeatedly cause trouble. Avoid removing many food groups at once without a reason; overly restrictive diets can create new nutritional problems.

Herbs deserve the same medication honesty

If herbal medicine is considered, disclose prescription medicines, supplements, allergies, pregnancy or breastfeeding and upcoming surgery. “Natural” does not mean interaction-free. In Singapore, HSA provides safety information about Chinese proprietary

medicines.

When to see a doctor

Seek medical review for persistent or worsening bloating, repeated vomiting, difficulty swallowing, blood in stool or black stool, unexplained weight loss, severe abdominal pain, fever or a new persistent change in bowel habits.

Turn symptoms into a useful pattern

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CHAPTER 03

Constipation: Everyday Habits, TCM Thinking and When to Get Help



Constipation can relate to fluids, fibre, activity, medicines and health conditions. See how TCM may discuss patterns while keeping medical red flags clear.

Key points

- Frequency alone does not define constipation; stool difficulty and change from your normal matter too.
- Fluids, fibre, movement and medicines are worth reviewing.
- New severe constipation with pain, vomiting or bleeding needs medical care.

What counts as constipation

Some people naturally open their bowels less often than others. Constipation is more about hard stools, straining, incomplete emptying or a clear change from your normal pattern than a single “correct” number of bowel movements.

Review the obvious contributors first

Low fibre intake, inadequate fluids, reduced activity, travel, schedule changes and some medicines can contribute. Increasing fibre too rapidly can worsen bloating for some people, so changes are often easier when gradual.

How TCM may describe different patterns

TCM may distinguish constipation associated with dryness, heat-like features, low energy or other pattern combinations. These descriptions guide traditional treatment, but persistent bowel changes still deserve conventional assessment when appropriate.

Avoid turning laxatives or herbs into a permanent habit

Regular self-treatment can mask an underlying problem. If you need repeated laxatives, strong herbal products or enemas to pass stool, speak with a healthcare professional about the cause and a safer long-term plan.

When to seek medical care

Get medical advice for a new persistent change in bowel habits, blood in stool, black stool, unexplained weight loss, severe abdominal pain, vomiting, fever, abdominal swelling or constipation that follows significant illness or surgery.

Turn symptoms into a useful pattern

For one week, note meal timing, portion size, bowel pattern, bloating or reflux, major trigger foods, medicines and stress. The aim is not to build a long forbidden-food list. Ask whether the pattern suggests a need for medical investigation, which simple habit changes are worth testing first, and how any herbal or dietary recommendation fits with your existing health conditions.

Test habits one at a time

If you suspect food or routine is contributing, avoid changing everything at once. Start with meal timing, portion size, hydration or one obvious trigger and observe for a reasonable period. Over-restriction can make eating stressful and nutritionally poor. If symptoms remain persistent despite simple changes, the next useful step is assessment rather than an ever-growing list of forbidden foods.

CHAPTER 04

Everyday TCM Food Therapy: A Practical Singapore Guide

Use TCM food traditions as inspiration for everyday meals without turning ingredients into medicines or making cure claims.

Key points

- Food therapy should support ordinary nutrition, not replace medical treatment.
- “Warming” and “cooling” are traditional categories, not literal temperature measurements.
- A varied diet is usually more useful than obsessing over one “superfood”.

Food first, medicine second

Traditional Chinese food therapy has a long history, but everyday meals should remain meals. Ginger, pear, red dates, barley, soups and herbal-style dishes can be enjoyed as food without promising that one ingredient will cure a disease.

Understand the traditional vocabulary

Terms such as warming, cooling, moistening or drying describe traditional qualities and patterns. They are not the same as calories, vitamins, glycaemic index or the physical temperature of a dish. It is useful to keep the two systems distinct.

Build a meal, not a remedy cabinet

A practical plate still needs enough protein, vegetables, staple foods and overall variety. Soups can be nourishing, but very salty soup or large portions may not suit everyone. People with diabetes, kidney disease or other conditions should follow medical dietary advice.

Use personal response as information

If a food repeatedly causes bloating, reflux, allergy symptoms or diarrhoea, that matters more than whether a chart labels it “warming” or “cooling”. Keep notes if necessary and discuss persistent reactions with a healthcare professional.

Be careful with medicinal herbs in cooking

When a recipe uses ingredients in medicinal quantities or unfamiliar herbs, the line between food and medicine can become less clear. Pregnancy, medicines and chronic conditions can change what is appropriate, so ask a qualified practitioner when in doubt.

Keep food advice practical

A food tradition can be useful without turning every meal into medicine. Ask whether the suggestion fits your actual diet, allergies and medical conditions, what evidence or tradition it comes from, and whether it is intended as general nourishment or a treatment claim. Sustainable meals usually matter more than one special ingredient.

Think in meals, not miracle ingredients

Rather than adding many special ingredients, look at what a normal week of meals actually contains. Regular meals, adequate protein, vegetables, fibre and appropriate hydration form the background against which traditional food ideas can be used. If one ingredient is promoted as solving many unrelated problems, treat the claim cautiously and keep expectations proportional.

CHAPTER 05

Chinese Herbs: Questions to Ask Before Taking a Formula



Learn why medication lists, allergies, pregnancy, supplements and ongoing medical care should be discussed before using herbal products.

Start with your full medication list

Herbs and supplements can interact with medicines or duplicate ingredients. Tell the practitioner about prescription drugs, non-prescription medicines, vitamins, supplements and products from other clinics.

Share important health information

Pregnancy, breastfeeding, allergies, kidney or liver problems and upcoming surgery can affect what may be appropriate. Do not assume a product is suitable simply because it is described as natural.

Understand the product

Ask what you are taking, how much to use, how often, for how long and what reactions should prompt you to stop. Keep the original packaging and directions where possible.

Do not delay necessary medical care

Persistent, severe or worsening symptoms deserve proper assessment. Traditional products should not be used to postpone urgent or necessary conventional medical care.

Tell the practitioner what is already in your body

Bring the names or photographs of prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, vitamins, supplements and other herbal products you take. Include allergies and previous reactions. Pregnancy, breastfeeding, liver or kidney disease and other significant conditions can change what is appropriate. This information is not an inconvenience; it is part of making herbal decisions more safely.

Natural is not the same as automatically safe

A plant-derived ingredient can still have physiological effects, interact with medicines or be unsuitable for a particular person. Product quality also matters. HSA advises consumers to be cautious of dubious products, exaggerated claims and products that may contain undeclared potent medicinal ingredients. Use reputable sources and avoid buying purely on testimonials or “quick cure” promises.

Know what you are taking and why

Ask what the formula or product is intended to support, how it should be taken, what symptoms should lead you to stop and seek advice, and when it should be reviewed. Keep your doctor informed when you are receiving ongoing medical care, especially if new medicines are started or doses change.

Singapore regulates health products, but consumers still need judgment

Health Sciences Authority guidance is an important reference for product safety. Products promoted online or through informal channels can still carry exaggerated claims, undeclared ingredients or quality concerns. A professional label, celebrity testimonial or the word “natural” is not proof that a product is suitable for you. Use reputable sources and be cautious of products promising rapid cures for many unrelated conditions.

A prescription should be understandable

You do not need to memorise every herb, but you should know whether you are taking a customised formula, a proprietary product or a supplement, how often to take it and for how long. Ask what the main purpose is and when the prescription should be reviewed. If the plan changes, keep the most recent instructions rather than relying on an older packet or a family member’s advice.

Interactions are not limited to prescription medicines

Over-the-counter painkillers, cold remedies, vitamins, supplements, traditional products and alcohol can all matter. Bring photographs of labels if remembering names is difficult. If a doctor starts a new medicine while you are using Chinese medicine, tell the TCM practitioner; if a TCM prescription changes, tell the doctor or pharmacist when relevant.

Stop and seek advice when a reaction is concerning

Unexpected rash, swelling, breathing difficulty, severe vomiting, fainting, yellowing of the eyes or skin, marked worsening of symptoms or other serious reactions deserve prompt medical attention. Do not keep taking a product simply because someone tells you that discomfort means the body is “detoxing”. Serious or persistent reactions need assessment.

Do not share personalised prescriptions casually

A formula prepared for one person may not be appropriate for a spouse, parent or friend with a similar-sounding symptom. Differences in medicines, pregnancy, allergies, chronic disease and the underlying cause matter. Sharing leftovers also makes it harder to know exactly what was taken if an adverse reaction occurs.

Storage and labels help prevent simple mistakes

Keep products in their original labelled containers where possible, away from children, heat and moisture. Do not mix several powders into an unlabelled jar or keep old packets without dates. If a reaction occurs, being able to identify exactly what you took makes medical assessment easier. Discard products that are expired, contaminated, badly stored or no longer clearly identifiable.

Children, pregnancy and frailty deserve extra caution

Dosing and suitability can change substantially for children, pregnancy, breastfeeding, older adults and people who are frail or have impaired liver or kidney function. Do not assume that a smaller amount of an adult product is automatically appropriate for a child. These situations deserve individual assessment, careful product selection and clear instructions.

CHAPTER 06

Stress and Sleep: A TCM Perspective Without the Mystique

Stress and poor sleep often reinforce each other. See how TCM pattern thinking can sit alongside practical sleep habits and conventional care.

Key points

- Stress can affect sleep, and poor sleep can make stress feel harder to manage.
- TCM pattern language is descriptive, not a replacement for mental-health or sleep diagnoses.
- Start with routines, workload, caffeine, exercise and the sleep environment.

Why stress and sleep travel together

When the mind remains alert after a demanding day, falling asleep can take longer and sleep may become lighter or more fragmented. Poor sleep then affects concentration, patience and resilience the next day. This creates a cycle that can feel bigger than either problem on its own.

Where TCM fits

A TCM practitioner may describe combinations of restlessness, digestive changes, headaches, palpitations, temperature sensations or fatigue using traditional pattern terms. These terms help guide TCM treatment choices, but they do not replace assessment for anxiety disorders, depression, insomnia, thyroid problems, sleep apnoea or other medical causes.

Make the evening less “busy”

A useful target is not a perfect wellness routine but a calmer final hour. Reduce work messages, bright screens and heavy meals where practical. Some people benefit from a short walk, warm shower, light stretching, breathing exercises or reading. Choose something repeatable rather than an elaborate ritual you will abandon after three nights.

What to tell your practitioner

Mention how long the problem has lasted, whether it began after a life event, how much caffeine and alcohol you use, your work schedule and any medicines or supplements. Tell the practitioner if you are already seeing a doctor or mental-health professional. TCM should be coordinated with—not hidden from—other care.

Get additional help when needed

Seek medical advice when sleep problems persist, when anxiety or low mood is difficult to manage, or when daytime functioning is significantly affected. Thoughts of self-harm or inability to stay safe require urgent professional help rather than a wellness article or routine TCM appointment.

Make the next conversation more useful

Before your appointment, note the timing and frequency of the problem, sleep and waking times, caffeine and alcohol, medicines, stressors and any symptoms such as snoring, breathlessness, pain or reflux. Useful questions include: What ordinary causes should I rule out? Which changes are worth trying first? How will we know whether the plan is helping? When should I seek conventional medical assessment instead?

Try a short observation period

For seven to fourteen days, keep the experiment simple. Record bedtime, wake time, night waking, naps, caffeine, alcohol, late meals, exercise and major stress. If you change something, change only one or two variables at a time. A small diary cannot diagnose a sleep disorder, but it can show whether your problem is linked with schedule, environment or particular habits and gives a clinician something more concrete to work with.

CHAPTER 07

Staying Comfortable in Singapore's Heat and Humidity: A TCM-Informed Guide



Adapt seasonal TCM ideas to Singapore's year-round heat, humidity, rain and air-conditioning without importing advice designed for four-season climates.

Key points

- Singapore's climate needs local adaptation rather than copying winter/summer advice from elsewhere.
- Hydration, clothing, sleep and air-conditioning often matter more than exotic remedies.
- Heat illness is a medical problem, not something to "push through".

Singapore is not a four-season climate

Traditional seasonal advice often comes from places with cold winters and dry autumns. In Singapore, the more useful question is how heat, humidity, heavy rain, indoor air-conditioning and abrupt temperature changes affect your comfort and daily habits.

Start with hydration and pacing

Drink according to thirst and activity, take breaks in very hot conditions and avoid pushing intense exercise when unwell or overheated. People with medical fluid restrictions should follow their doctor's advice rather than generic hydration tips.

Air-conditioning can create a second climate

Moving from outdoor heat into cold, dry indoor air can feel uncomfortable. Light layers, adjusting direct airflow and maintaining a comfortable sleeping temperature may help more than labelling every dry throat or stiff shoulder as "wind-cold".

Food therapy should stay practical

Cooling or warming food categories can be used as a traditional way to think about variety, but there is no need to fear ordinary foods. Choose balanced meals that suit your digestion, activity and medical needs.

Recognise heat illness

Confusion, collapse, severe weakness, very high body temperature or worsening symptoms after heat exposure can signal a medical emergency. Move to a cooler place and seek urgent medical help rather than relying on herbal drinks or home remedies.

Adapt advice to Singapore rather than a four-season script

Notice whether heat, humidity, rain, haze, air-conditioning, travel or indoor environments change your symptoms. Ask which advice is simply general lifestyle support, what is based on TCM tradition, and what symptoms require modern medical diagnosis. The useful goal is adaptation, not forcing Singapore life into a climate pattern that does not fit.

Build your own Singapore trigger map

Instead of assuming every symptom is caused by “heat” or “dampness”, note whether it appears after haze, rain, outdoor heat, a cold office, travel, poor sleep or a particular indoor environment. This keeps traditional lifestyle ideas connected to your real surroundings and helps separate a useful observation from a vague label that could fit almost anything.

CHAPTER 08

Your First TCM Consultation in Singapore: What to Expect

A practical guide to preparing for a TCM consultation, what information to bring and what a careful assessment may involve.

Before you go

Write down your main concern, how long it has been present and what makes it better or worse. Bring a list of prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Relevant medical reports can also help the practitioner understand context.

What the practitioner may ask

A TCM consultation may include questions about sleep, appetite, digestion, energy, temperature preferences and other patterns in addition to the main complaint. The purpose is to understand the person as a whole rather than to rely on one symptom alone.

What you should ask

Ask what the practitioner is considering, what the proposed approach involves, how long a session takes, what it costs and whether there are reasons it may not be suitable for you.

When conventional medical care comes first

Sudden severe symptoms, chest pain, difficulty breathing, loss of consciousness, major bleeding, stroke-like symptoms or rapidly worsening illness require urgent conventional medical attention. Call 995 in an emergency.

What makes a first consultation useful

The first visit does not need to produce a dramatic answer in a few minutes. A useful consultation should help you organise the problem: what you are experiencing, how long it has been happening, what has already been investigated, what medicines or supplements

you use, and what you hope to improve. If a recommendation is made, you should understand what it is intended to support, what practical limits apply and when the plan should be reviewed.

Bring the information that prevents guesswork

A medicine list, allergy information, recent medical reports and a short timeline of symptoms can save time. For recurring problems, note what makes symptoms better or worse and whether sleep, meals, stress, movement or menstrual cycle changes are relevant. You do not need to stop conventional treatment before seeing a TCM practitioner; in fact, accurate information about current care makes the consultation safer.

Questions you are allowed to ask

Ask why a particular treatment is being suggested, whether there are alternatives, what sensations or side effects may occur, how many sessions should pass before reviewing progress, and whether anything should be discussed with your doctor or pharmacist. A responsible consultation should make room for questions rather than relying on authority alone.

Prepare a one-minute summary before you arrive

A useful first sentence is simple: what the main problem is, when it started, how often it happens and what you most want help with. Then add the information that changes decisions - major diagnoses, current medicines, allergies, pregnancy where relevant, recent procedures and important test results. This gives the practitioner a clear starting point without requiring you to remember every detail in perfect order.

Tongue and pulse are part of the TCM framework

Some TCM consultations include looking at the tongue and feeling the pulse at the wrist. These observations are interpreted within traditional diagnostic frameworks. They are not substitutes for blood tests, imaging, physical examination or a biomedical diagnosis when those are needed. If a traditional term sounds like the name of a modern organ disease, ask the practitioner to explain exactly what is meant.

A treatment plan should have a review point

Whether the recommendation is acupuncture, Tuina, Chinese medicine, lifestyle advice or a combination, ask how progress will be judged. A useful plan has a realistic review point rather than continuing indefinitely without reflection. Improvement might mean sleeping longer, walking farther, having fewer headache days or relying less on rescue medication - the goal should be concrete enough that both you and the practitioner can discuss whether the approach is worthwhile.

Tell the practitioner when something changes

New medicines, a new diagnosis, pregnancy, surgery, a fall, worsening symptoms or an unexpected reaction can change what is appropriate. Do not assume the information you gave months ago is still enough. Updating the practitioner is especially important when herbs, supplements or manual treatment are involved, because safety decisions depend on your current situation.

Leave with an explanation you can repeat

Before leaving, you should be able to explain in plain language what is being recommended, what it is intended to support, how often to use it, what normal reactions might occur, what warning signs matter and when to review. If you cannot explain the plan back to yourself, ask again. Clear communication is not a luxury; it is part of responsible care.

What a follow-up visit should clarify

A follow-up should not simply repeat the first appointment. It should compare what changed, what did not, whether any new symptoms appeared and whether the original goal still makes sense. If treatment has been tried, describe what happened between visits rather than only how you feel at that moment. This helps distinguish a temporary good day from a consistent trend and gives both sides a reason to continue, modify or stop a plan.

When it is reasonable to pause or seek another opinion

If you do not understand the explanation, feel pressured into a long package, are repeatedly told that worsening symptoms are always a good sign, or are discouraged from obtaining necessary medical assessment, it is reasonable to pause. A second opinion can be useful when the diagnosis is unclear, the recommended course is unusually long or expensive, or your condition is changing in a way that has not been adequately explained.

Practical consultation checklist

- What is the main concern, and when did it start?
- What clearly makes it better or worse?
- Which medicines, supplements or herbs are you taking?
- Are there allergies, pregnancy considerations or chronic conditions that matter?
- Which symptoms are new, severe, persistent or changing quickly?
- What is the single most useful outcome you want from this consultation?
- What would mean conventional medical review or emergency care should come first?

Contact Shande

For appointments and general enquiries, use WhatsApp or WeChat. Email is not presented as a routine customer-service channel.

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References & further reading

The chapters in this guide are drawn from the Shande Health Library. Key safety points are linked back to the public-health or professional sources cited in those articles.

General health education | Not a diagnosis | Emergency in Singapore: 995