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Food Therapy & Everyday Nourishment

Balanced meals, digestive comfort, herbal soups and safer everyday choices in Singapore

Table of contents

Balanced meals, digestive comfort, herbal soups and safer everyday choices in Singapore

Before you begin	3
Balanced Meals in Singapore: A Practical Starting Point Before Food Therapy	4
Everyday TCM Food Therapy: A Practical Singapore Guide	5
Food Therapy Is Not the Same as Medical Treatment	6
Herbal Soups and Everyday Food: Where Cooking Ends and Medicine Begins	7
Digestive Comfort in Singapore: Hawker Food, Late Meals and TCM Habits	8
Bloating and Indigestion: A TCM Perspective With Practical Limits	9
Constipation: Everyday Habits, TCM Thinking and When to Get Help	10
Chinese Herbs: Questions to Ask Before Taking a Formula	11
Healthy Ageing: Strength, Sleep, Appetite and Everyday Function	13
Practical consultation checklist	14
References & further reading	14

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

Food therapy is most useful when it makes everyday eating clearer, not more complicated. This guide begins with balanced nutrition and familiar Singapore meals, then explains how TCM food traditions can sit alongside modern dietary principles. It also covers digestion, herbal soups, product safety and the line between food advice and medical treatment.

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

Balanced Meals in Singapore: A Practical Starting Point Before Food Therapy



How to use everyday Singapore meals, My Healthy Plate and TCM food traditions without turning eating into a complicated rulebook.

Key points

- Balance, variety and moderation are a stronger foundation than chasing a single “superfood”.
- My Healthy Plate offers a simple Singapore-specific visual guide.
- TCM food therapy can sit alongside balanced nutrition, not replace it.

Start with the plate, not the supplement shelf

HealthHub’s My Healthy Plate uses a simple quarter-quarter-half idea: roughly a quarter wholegrains, a quarter protein and half fruit and vegetables, with water as the usual drink. The exact meal can still look very Singaporean.

Apply the idea to familiar food

At a mixed-rice stall, choose a vegetable dish, a protein dish and a sensible staple portion. With noodles, add vegetables and a protein source rather than treating the noodles alone as a complete meal. With soup, remember that a light broth may still need enough protein and other food alongside it.

TCM food therapy is a tradition, not a replacement diet

TCM may describe foods using ideas such as warming, cooling or supporting particular patterns. Those traditional descriptions can guide culinary choices, but they do not replace nutritional needs or medical diets prescribed for conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease or food allergy.

Regularity can matter more than perfection

Long workdays can lead to skipped meals followed by very large late-night meals. A realistic goal may be more regular eating, enough vegetables, adequate protein and water, rather than an elaborate menu that cannot be sustained.

Use symptoms as feedback, not proof of a diagnosis

If particular meals repeatedly cause pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, swallowing problems, blood in stool or significant weight loss, seek medical assessment. Do not keep eliminating food groups indefinitely without understanding the reason.

CHAPTER 02

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 03

Food Therapy Is Not the Same as Medical Treatment



A clear explanation of what TCM-informed food choices can and cannot reasonably do.

Key points

- Food supports health, but meals should not be sold as cures for serious disease.
- Medical diets and medicine interactions take priority when relevant.
- Use TCM food traditions as an additional lens, not a reason to ignore balanced nutrition.

Food has an important job already

Meals provide energy, protein, vitamins, minerals, fibre and enjoyment. A balanced diet supports long-term health without needing every ingredient to have a therapeutic claim. HealthHub emphasises variety, balance and moderation.

Traditional food language can still be useful

TCM food therapy often talks about warming, cooling, moistening or supporting digestion. These ideas can be part of cultural food choices and personal comfort. They should be presented as traditional concepts rather than laboratory diagnoses.

Do not replace necessary treatment with recipes

Food cannot replace antibiotics when they are medically needed, emergency treatment, insulin or other prescribed care. People with kidney disease, diabetes, swallowing problems, severe food allergy or other medical needs may require specific dietary advice.

Avoid unnecessary restriction

If a list of “forbidden” foods becomes longer and longer, nutrition can suffer and eating can become stressful. Elimination diets should have a clear reason and an appropriate plan for reassessment.

A sensible Shande approach

Use food guidance to make ordinary meals more thoughtful: regular timing, balanced portions, adequate hydration and ingredients that suit the person. If symptoms persist, the next step is assessment, not simply adding more dietary rules.

CHAPTER 04

Herbal Soups and Everyday Food: Where Cooking Ends and Medicine Begins

A safety-conscious guide to herbal soups, traditional ingredients and when a food-like product should be discussed as medicine.

Key points

- Not every herb in a soup is equivalent to a medicinal prescription.
- Medicinal ingredients can interact with medicines or be unsuitable in pregnancy or certain illnesses.
- Buy herbs and health products from reputable sources and avoid exaggerated claims.

Food and medicine can overlap

Singapore families may use red dates, goji berries, ginger or other traditional ingredients in cooking. The amount used, purpose, concentration and person consuming it all matter. A culinary ingredient in a normal meal is not automatically the same as a medicinal dose or formula.

More herbs do not automatically mean more benefit

Combining many ingredients because each is believed to do something different can create an unnecessarily complicated mixture. If a person has kidney or liver disease, is pregnant, takes anticoagulants or uses multiple medicines, discuss concentrated herbal products with a qualified professional.

Product quality matters

HSA warns consumers about adulterated or dubious herbal products, including products that may contain undeclared potent medicines. Buy from reputable sources and be cautious of claims promising quick cures or results across many unrelated conditions.

Keep everyday cooking enjoyable

A nourishing soup can simply be food: vegetables, protein, grains or legumes, herbs and spices chosen for taste and a balanced meal. It does not need a medical claim to be worthwhile.

When to ask a TCM physician

If you want a formula for a specific health concern rather than a family recipe, consultation is the safer route. Bring a current medicine and supplement list and explain any allergies, pregnancy or chronic conditions.

CHAPTER 05

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 06

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

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

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CHAPTER 07

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 08

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 09

Healthy Ageing: Strength, Sleep, Appetite and Everyday Function

Healthy ageing is not about avoiding every symptom. It is about preserving function, confidence and independence while recognising problems early enough to act.

Key points

- Strength, balance, sleep, nutrition and medication review all matter.
- Unexplained weight loss, recurrent falls or new confusion deserve medical assessment.
- TCM should complement long-term disease management, not replace it.

Function is a useful measure

Can you walk comfortably, climb stairs, carry groceries, get up from a chair and manage daily tasks? Small declines in these abilities can matter more than a single wellness number. Regular activity and appropriate strength training help preserve muscle and balance.

Protect appetite and nutrition

Older adults may eat less because of dental issues, medicines, low mood, altered taste or illness. Unexplained weight loss is not something to celebrate automatically. Review meal quality, protein, hydration and whether swallowing or chewing has become difficult.

Sleep changes, but severe disruption is not inevitable

Sleep can become lighter with age, yet persistent insomnia, loud snoring, breathing pauses, restless legs, pain or frequent night urination may have treatable causes. Record the pattern before assuming poor sleep is simply part of ageing.

Where TCM may fit

Some older adults use acupuncture, Tuina or Chinese medicine for comfort or symptom support. Care should consider frailty, skin condition, blood thinners, osteoporosis, implanted devices, kidney or liver disease and the number of medicines already being taken.

Know the red flags

New confusion, sudden weakness, chest pain, severe breathlessness, a fall with possible head injury, repeated falls, unexplained weight loss or rapidly worsening function require medical evaluation.

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.

- **HealthHub: My Healthy Plate**

<https://www.healthhub.sg/well-being-and-lifestyle/food-diet-and-nutrition/plan-your-meals-with-my-healthy-plate>

- **HealthHub: Balanced Diet**

<https://www.healthhub.sg/well-being-and-lifestyle/food-diet-and-nutrition/healthy-balanced-diet-plan>

- **HSA: Traditional herbal remedies - quality and safety matters**

<https://www.hsa.gov.sg/announcements/traditional-herbal-remedies/>

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