



SHANDE TCM

Living With Long-Term Health Conditions: A Safer TCM Co-Care Guide

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Living With Long-Term Health Conditions: A Safer TCM Co-Care Guide

General health education · Not individual diagnosis · Serious symptoms require conventional medical care first

This book organises common symptoms, medicines, daily records and safety red flags so you can prepare clearer information before seeing a doctor or TCM practitioner. Traditional TCM concepts may provide a discussion framework, but they do not replace biomedical diagnosis, testing or emergency care.

How to use this book

You do not need to read from the first page to the last. Start with the chapter closest to your current concern, then write down the symptoms, medicines, daily changes and red flags that apply to you. The aim is not to diagnose yourself; it is to describe the problem more accurately and avoid leaving out important information during a consultation.

Keep traditional concepts separate from biomedical diagnosis

Traditional TCM terminology can help a practitioner discuss the whole-person picture, but it is not a substitute for blood tests, imaging, blood pressure, glucose testing, diagnosis of infection or anaemia, or neurological assessment. Both languages can coexist, but safety-critical medical questions still need appropriate conventional evaluation.

Create one shared health list

Keep prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, supplements, herbs, allergies, known diagnoses, recent tests and important past side effects on one list. Give the same information to your doctor, pharmacist and TCM practitioner where relevant. This reduces the risk of each provider seeing only part of the picture.

Chapter 1 · High Blood Pressure and TCM: A Safe Co-Care Guide

Start with measurements, not sensations

High blood pressure often causes no obvious symptoms. Headache, flushing, neck tension or dizziness cannot reliably tell you whether blood pressure is controlled. If you monitor at home, record the actual reading, date, time, medicines taken and anything unusual such as recent exercise, caffeine, smoking or illness.

Make home readings more useful

Use the monitor according to its instructions, sit quietly first, support the arm and avoid talking during the reading. A single unexpected number can be affected by technique, stress or recent activity. Follow the monitoring schedule given by your clinician rather than repeatedly checking whenever you feel worried.

Keep prescribed treatment in the plan

An improved reading can mean treatment is working; it is not automatically a reason to stop medicine. If you suspect side effects such as dizziness, swelling or cough, note the timing and speak with the prescribing doctor or pharmacist rather than changing the dose yourself.

Tell every practitioner what you take

Bring one complete list of prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, vitamins, supplements and herbal products. Natural products can still have interactions. Kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes, pregnancy, previous stroke and upcoming procedures should also be disclosed.

Where TCM may fit

Some people seek acupuncture or other TCM support for stress, sleep, muscle tension or general wellbeing while hypertension is managed medically. Keep those goals separate from claims of curing hypertension. TCM support should sit alongside blood-pressure follow-up and cardiovascular risk management.

Know the red flags

Very high readings together with chest pain, severe breathlessness, fainting, new weakness or numbness, confusion, severe sudden headache or major vision change require urgent medical assessment. In a life-threatening emergency in Singapore, call 995.

Chapter reminder: sudden, severe or progressively worsening symptoms, or red flags involving breathing, consciousness, major bleeding or progressive weakness, require conventional medical assessment first.



Shande Health Library: contextual photography related to this chapter.

Chapter 2 · Diabetes and TCM: Food, Medicines, Monitoring and Safer Support

Diabetes is more than “too much sugar”

Diabetes is diagnosed and monitored with biomedical tests. Thirst, fatigue or a traditional TCM pattern cannot replace glucose testing. Depending on your treatment, your medical team may monitor HbA1c, home glucose, blood pressure, kidney function, cholesterol, weight and foot health.

Do not adjust medicines casually

Some diabetes medicines and insulin can cause low blood sugar, while others have different precautions. If you are eating much less, fasting for a procedure, changing diet substantially or starting a supplement, tell the healthcare team managing your diabetes before changing treatment.

Make food advice practical

A sustainable plan considers carbohydrate amount, portions, meal timing, fibre, protein and medicines. In Singapore this often means learning how rice, noodles, drinks, desserts and snacks fit into the day rather than banning one familiar food completely.

Treat “sugar support” products cautiously

Herbal or supplement products marketed for glucose control can contain concentrated or multiple ingredients. They may interact with medicines or affect the kidneys or liver. Bring the packaging or a clear label photo to your doctor, pharmacist and TCM practitioner.

Where TCM may fit

A person with diabetes may seek TCM for pain, muscle tension, sleep or stress. Treatment should account for poor sensation, wound healing, infected skin, ulcers and blood-thinning medicines. Complementary care should not operate separately from the diabetes care plan.

Know when glucose problems are urgent

Follow the personal action plan given by your medical team for low blood sugar, high blood sugar and sick days. Confusion, collapse, seizure, severe dehydration, persistent vomiting or breathing difficulty require urgent medical care.

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Chapter 3 · Taking Several Medicines? How to Discuss Herbs and TCM Safely

The combination is often the issue

People may receive medicines from several clinics while also buying supplements or traditional products. Each item may have a purpose, but combinations can change bleeding risk, blood pressure, glucose, alertness, stomach irritation and kidney or liver handling.

Build one useful medication list

Write the product name, strength if known, how often you take it, why you take it and who recommended it. Include creams, inhalers, eye drops, painkillers, vitamins, herbal teas used medicinally and “health tonics”. Photograph labels when names are unclear.

Bring the same list to TCM appointments

A TCM practitioner needs to know about blood thinners, diabetes treatment, blood-pressure medicine, steroids, seizure medicines and other therapies. This information can affect needling, massage pressure, heat therapies, herbal formulas and aftercare.

Natural does not mean harmless

Natural ingredients can cause allergies, stomach irritation, sedation, bleeding or medicine interactions. Concentrated extracts are not the same as ordinary food amounts. Be especially cautious with products that promise rapid cures or tell you to stop prescribed medicine.

Older adults need extra attention

Ageing can change kidney function, balance, hydration and sensitivity to sedating medicines. New appetite loss, confusion, dizziness or unsteady walking after a medicine or supplement change should be reviewed rather than dismissed as normal ageing.

Treat new symptoms as information

If unusual bruising, bleeding, rash, breathing difficulty, severe stomach upset, confusion or profound sleepiness appears after a product change, note what changed and when. Severe reactions, major bleeding, collapse or breathing difficulty require urgent care.

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Chapter 4 · Poor Appetite and Unplanned Weight Loss in Older Adults: When to Investigate

Look for a trend, not one small meal

The concern is a pattern: looser clothes, repeatedly unfinished meals, reduced strength or measurable weight loss without trying. If possible, weigh under similar conditions every one or two weeks and note whether the change began after illness, hospitalisation, a medicine change or a major life event.

Ask what makes eating difficult

Dental pain, dry mouth, taste change, constipation, reflux, nausea, depression, loneliness, fatigue, breathlessness and difficulty shopping or cooking can reduce intake. Coughing or choking with food, a wet voice after swallowing or food feeling stuck deserves medical assessment.

Medicines can affect appetite

Some medicines cause nausea, dry mouth, constipation, sleepiness or taste change. Do not stop them independently. Bring the complete list to a doctor or pharmacist and explain when appetite or weight changed.

When portions shrink, nutrition matters more

Smaller frequent meals may be easier than large meals. Include protein and energy-dense nutritious foods that fit the person's medical needs. People with diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease or swallowing problems may need tailored advice.

Frailty is about function too

Weight loss becomes more concerning when it comes with weaker grip, slower walking, difficulty standing from a chair, lower activity or exhaustion. Early medical, dietetic and functional assessment can identify reversible contributors.

Know the red flags

Persistent unplanned weight loss, difficulty swallowing, repeated vomiting, black or bloody stools, persistent diarrhoea, fever, night sweats, a new lump, marked breathlessness or rapidly declining strength require medical review.

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Chapter 5 · Herbs, Medicines & Supplements: Why a Complete List Matters

“Natural” is not the same as “inactive”

Herbs and supplements can have physiological effects. That is exactly why people take them - and why interactions, side effects or duplicate ingredients are possible.

Make one master list

Include prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, vitamins, supplements, herbal formulas, teas used medicinally and occasional products. Add dose and frequency where possible. Keep the same list for your doctor, pharmacist and TCM practitioner.

Certain situations deserve extra caution

Pregnancy, breastfeeding, liver or kidney disease, blood-thinning treatment, cancer therapy, seizure medicines, transplant medicines and planned surgery are examples where additional review may be important.

Do not stop prescribed treatment on your own

If someone recommends stopping a prescribed medicine solely to begin a supplement or herbal formula, involve the original prescriber. Coordination is safer than forcing the two systems to operate separately.

Watch for duplicate ingredients and changing products

Combination products can contain many ingredients. Taking several products at once can make it difficult to know what caused a reaction. Change one thing at a time where clinically appropriate and keep the packaging.

Bring the actual product when names are unclear

Brand names and translated herb names can be confusing. A photograph or original package often provides more useful information than trying to remember a name phonetically.

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Chapter 6 · TCM and Conventional Medical Care: Using Both Responsibly

Tell each provider what you are using

Good communication reduces avoidable risks. Tell your TCM practitioner about your medical diagnoses, prescriptions and hospital care, and tell your doctor or pharmacist about herbs, supplements and TCM products.

Do not stop prescribed treatment on your own

If you are considering changing a prescription medicine, discuss it with the clinician who prescribed it. Stopping some medicines suddenly can be dangerous.

Keep records

A simple list of medicines, supplements, allergies and recent tests makes it easier for different providers to understand your care.

Recognise emergencies

TCM clinics are not emergency departments. For severe or sudden symptoms, difficulty breathing, major bleeding, stroke-like symptoms or loss of consciousness, call 995 or seek urgent conventional care.

You do not have to choose one side

Many people use TCM while also seeing a GP, specialist, physiotherapist or other healthcare professional. The safest approach is transparency. Tell each provider what medicines, herbs, supplements and treatments you are using. This allows interactions, duplicated treatment and conflicting advice to be considered rather than hidden.

Different systems answer different questions

A TCM pattern description and a biomedical diagnosis are not interchangeable. One may be used to organise treatment within the TCM framework, while the other may rely on examination, imaging, laboratory tests or established diagnostic criteria. Keeping those roles clear reduces confusion and prevents traditional terminology from being mistaken for proof of organ disease.

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One-page consultation checklist

- ☐ When the main symptom started and what is different from your usual baseline
- ☐ All prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbs
- ☐ Known diagnoses, allergies, recent tests or hospital care
- ☐ What clearly improves or worsens the symptom
- ☐ Any red flags such as bleeding, fainting, breathlessness, repeated vomiting, weakness or numbness
- ☐ The three questions you most want answered

Safety note

This book provides general education, not an individual diagnosis or treatment plan. Do not stop prescribed medicine on your own. Severe, sudden or rapidly worsening symptoms require appropriate medical assessment first; call 995 for emergencies in Singapore.