



SHANDE TCM

Pain That Travels: Nerves, Stiffness, Cramps & Mobility

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Pain That Travels: Nerves, Stiffness, Cramps & Mobility

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 · Back Pain That Travels Down the Leg: Sciatica-Like Symptoms, TCM and Red Flags

Describe where symptoms travel

Note whether pain starts in the back or buttock and travels into the thigh, calf or foot, and whether it feels aching, burning, electric, tingling or numb. Also note what sitting, bending, walking, coughing or sneezing does to the symptoms.

Strength and sensation matter

New weakness can be more important than the pain score. Notice whether one foot drags, the knee gives way, you cannot rise onto toes or heels as usual, or a patch of skin has become clearly numb.

Keep moving within tolerable limits

For many uncomplicated back-pain episodes, complete bed rest is not helpful. Short walks and position changes may be useful. Avoid forcing stretches through sharp leg pain or repeatedly testing movements that clearly worsen numbness or weakness.

Where TCM may fit

A TCM practitioner may consider acupuncture or Tuina for suitable cases, but traditional pattern terms do not prove that discs, nerves or joints are normal. Significant neurological findings may need conventional assessment before or alongside complementary treatment.

Stronger treatment is not automatically better

If a technique sends sharp pain further down the leg, causes new numbness, worsens weakness or leaves symptoms substantially aggravated, tell the practitioner and stop. Osteoporosis, blood-thinning medicines and recent trauma require additional caution.

Neurological red flags need urgent care

New loss of bladder or bowel control, inability to pass urine, numbness around the groin or saddle area, or rapidly worsening weakness in one or both legs requires urgent medical assessment.

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



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Chapter 2 · Understanding Lower Back Pain in TCM: Start With the Basics

Back pain has many possible causes

Muscle strain, prolonged sitting, deconditioning, joint changes and disc-related problems are only some possibilities. Because different causes can feel similar, it is unhelpful to assume that every lower-back ache has the same TCM or biomedical explanation.

What a careful TCM visit may include

The practitioner may ask how the pain began, what movements aggravate it, whether it travels into the leg, whether there is numbness or weakness and how sleep, work and activity are affected. TCM examination may add traditional pattern observations, but basic safety questions should never be skipped.

Movement often matters

For many uncomplicated episodes, staying gently active is usually more useful than prolonged bed rest. The right level of movement depends on the person and the cause. If pain clearly worsens with activity or follows an injury, get assessed before pushing through.

Where acupuncture or Tuina may fit

Some people use acupuncture or Tuina as part of conservative pain management. A responsible practitioner should explain the proposed approach, expected sensations, treatment frequency and reasons to stop or refer for further medical assessment.

Red flags need prompt care

Seek urgent medical attention for new severe weakness, loss of bladder or bowel control, numbness around the groin or saddle area, major trauma, fever with severe back pain, or rapidly worsening neurological symptoms. These are not situations to manage with routine massage or self-treatment.

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.

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Chapter 3 · Shoulder Pain and Stiffness: What to Check Before Calling It 'Frozen Shoulder'

Stiff shoulder is a description, not a diagnosis

Frozen shoulder has a characteristic pattern of pain and restricted movement, but tendon problems, arthritis, previous injury and neck-related pain can overlap. Describe which movements are limited and whether the restriction developed gradually or suddenly.

Track everyday function

Notice whether you can wash your hair, reach a shelf, put on a seat belt, lie on the affected side or reach behind your back. Functional tasks are usually more informative than repeatedly forcing the arm to test a pain score.

Ask what happened before it started

A shoulder that stiffened slowly is different from pain after a fall, dislocation, heavy lift or sudden pull. Diabetes, previous surgery and prolonged immobilisation can also be relevant.

Rehabilitation needs patience

Movement is often progressed according to the phase and tolerance of the problem. Aggressive stretching that causes prolonged severe pain is not a shortcut. If a physiotherapist or doctor has prescribed exercises, tell complementary practitioners what you have been advised to do or avoid.

Where TCM may fit

Acupuncture or Tuina may be considered for suitable patients, but treatment should adapt to irritability and medical history. Needling or manual therapy should not be described as a way to “break” a frozen joint in one session.

Know when assessment matters

Significant trauma, visible deformity, inability to use the arm, sudden major weakness, a hot swollen joint with fever, neurological symptoms, or shoulder pain with chest pressure or breathlessness require prompt medical assessment.

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Chapter 4 · Neck and Shoulder Tension From Desk Work: A Sensible TCM Approach

Why desk work can feel so tiring

Long periods in one position can fatigue muscles around the neck, shoulders and upper back. Screen height, laptop use, stress, sleep and physical conditioning all influence how much discomfort a person feels.

Do not obsess over one perfect posture

A good workstation matters, but no posture stays comfortable forever. Frequent small changes, standing briefly, moving the shoulders and looking away from the screen are often more realistic than trying to sit rigidly “correct” for eight hours.

How TCM treatment may be used

Tuina or acupuncture may be used for short-term symptom relief or as part of a broader plan. The treatment should be adapted if there is recent trauma, severe osteoporosis, anticoagulant use, neurological symptoms or other medical concerns.

What you can change between visits

Build movement into the workday, position frequently used items within easy reach and consider a separate keyboard or screen for prolonged laptop use. Strengthening and general exercise can help reduce recurrence more than relying on passive treatment alone.

When to see a doctor

Seek medical assessment for persistent arm weakness, numbness that is worsening, loss of coordination, severe headache after an injury, fever with severe neck stiffness or pain associated with major trauma.

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.

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Chapter 5 · Muscle Cramps: Hydration, Exercise, Medicines and When to Get Checked

Describe when the cramp happens

Is it during exercise, after exercise, while sleeping or at random? Which muscle tightens, how long does it last and does gentle stretching change it? A short pattern diary is more useful than only remembering the worst episode.

Hydration matters, but more is not always better

Singapore heat and sweating can increase fluid loss. Replace fluids regularly and watch thirst, dizziness and urine output. People with heart or kidney conditions may have individual fluid limits, so excessive water or supplements are not a universal solution.

Review exercise changes

Cramps can appear when training volume, hills, footwear or sport changes faster than the body adapts. Build activity gradually. If there is a tear sensation, major swelling or inability to use the limb, treat it as an injury rather than an ordinary cramp.

Medicines can be relevant

Some medicines can affect fluid balance or mineral levels. If cramps started after a new prescription or dose change, bring the medicine list to the prescribing doctor or pharmacist. Do not stop medicines on your own.

Where TCM may fit

Acupuncture, Tuina or lifestyle advice may be considered for muscular tension and recovery when the person is otherwise stable. A hot, swollen calf, infected skin or unexplained severe limb pain should not simply be massaged.

Red flags should not be massaged away

A swollen, red, warm painful leg, new severe weakness, persistent numbness, severe dehydration or sudden chest pain or breathlessness requires medical assessment; chest symptoms with a swollen painful leg can be an emergency.

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Chapter 6 · Ankle and Wrist Sprains: Early Care, TCM Support and When an X-Ray May Be Needed

Start with the mechanism

How did the injury happen - twisting, falling, direct impact or landing awkwardly? Note immediate swelling, bruising, whether you heard or felt a crack, and whether you could continue walking or using the hand.

Protect the injured area early

Avoid repeatedly testing a painful joint. Relative rest, comfortable support and elevation can help in the early period. Ice can reduce pain for some people when used briefly with skin protection; the priority is comfort and avoiding further injury.

Do not rush into strong manipulation

Fresh injuries with significant swelling or uncertain diagnosis should not be forcefully manipulated or deeply massaged. Tuina or acupuncture may be considered later when serious injury has been excluded and the treatment suits the stage of recovery.

Bone tenderness and function matter

Marked tenderness directly over a bone, visible deformity, inability to take steps after an ankle injury, inability to grip or move the wrist, numbness or worsening pain are reasons to seek medical assessment. Imaging may be needed depending on the findings.

Rehabilitation matters after the acute phase

Once a serious injury is excluded and pain is settling, gradual movement, strength and balance work can help return function. Staying completely inactive for too long can also delay recovery.

Know when to seek urgent care

Prompt review is needed for obvious deformity, severe swelling, loss of circulation or sensation, open wounds, uncontrolled pain or inability to use the limb. Major trauma or other life-threatening injury requires emergency care.

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Chapter 7 · Acupuncture Preparation & Aftercare: A Practical Patient Guide

Before the appointment: bring the facts that change safety

Tell the practitioner about pregnancy, blood-thinning medicines, bleeding disorders, implanted electrical devices, fainting history, reduced skin sensation, immune problems and major diagnoses. Bring an updated medicine and supplement list rather than relying on memory.

Eat and hydrate normally unless you were given individual instructions

Arriving very hungry, dehydrated, intoxicated or exhausted can make a session less comfortable. A normal light meal and usual hydration are generally more sensible than elaborate pre-treatment rituals. Wear clothing that allows reasonable access to the area being discussed.

During treatment: communication matters more than endurance

Acupuncture sensations vary. Dull pressure, heaviness or brief tingling can occur, but sharp, burning, electric or intolerable pain should be reported immediately. A practitioner can adjust or remove a needle; severe discomfort is not something a patient must “push through”.

Aftercare is usually simple

Most people can return to ordinary activities unless they have been given specific advice. Get up slowly, hydrate normally and notice how you feel. Mild local tenderness or a small bruise can occur, but unexpected or worsening symptoms should be discussed with the clinic or medically assessed when appropriate.

Know the purpose and the review point

Before committing to an open-ended course, define what improvement would look like: fewer pain days, easier movement, better sleep or improved function. Ask when the plan will be reviewed and what would lead to a change in approach.

Urgent symptoms do not belong in an acupuncture queue

Chest pain, severe breathlessness, new weakness, sudden severe headache, major injury or rapidly worsening symptoms require appropriate conventional medical care. Complementary treatment should not delay emergency assessment.

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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.