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The Shande Guide to Traditional Chinese Medicine in Singapore

A practical, safety-conscious introduction for everyday readers

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A practical, safety-conscious introduction for everyday readers

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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

Traditional Chinese Medicine can feel unfamiliar because its language and historical framework differ from modern biomedicine. This guide explains the main ideas, consultation process and common therapies in plain language while keeping medicine interactions, safety and conventional medical care clearly in view.

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

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.

CHAPTER 02

TCM and Conventional Medical Care: Using Both Responsibly

A safety-first guide to communication between healthcare providers and situations that require urgent conventional medical attention.

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.

Urgent care is not a competition

Chest pain, severe breathing difficulty, stroke-like symptoms, major trauma, uncontrolled bleeding, loss of consciousness and other emergencies need immediate conventional medical care. Complementary treatment can be reconsidered after urgent problems are stabilised. Responsible TCM should never require delaying emergency assessment.

Give both sides the same medication list

One of the simplest safety habits is to keep a current list of prescription medicines, non-prescription products, vitamins, supplements and Chinese medicines. Show the same list to your doctor and TCM practitioner when relevant. This reduces the chance that each provider is working with only half the information.

Test results do not lose importance because you use TCM

Blood tests, imaging and specialist diagnoses can answer questions that traditional pattern assessment cannot. If a doctor has identified diabetes, anaemia, a fracture, infection or another condition, do not replace that information with a TCM label. Traditional care may still be discussed as complementary support, but the established diagnosis remains important for safety and planning.

Chronic disease needs coordination, not secrecy

People with high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney or liver disease, cancer, heart disease and other chronic conditions may still be interested in TCM. The safest approach is coordinated disclosure. Some herbs, supplements or changes in diet may affect medicines or laboratory results, so your treating medical team should know what you are using.

Do not stop prescribed medicine because of a broad promise

Be cautious if anyone tells you to stop essential medicine immediately because a complementary treatment can “replace” it, especially without speaking to the prescriber. Changes to long-term medication often need monitoring and should be made with the healthcare professional responsible for that treatment.

The best integration is practical

Integrated care does not require both systems to agree on every theory. It requires each to stay within its strengths, communicate clearly and avoid delaying necessary care. A patient should be able to use TCM for appropriate goals while still receiving vaccinations, screening, emergency care, surgery, medicines or rehabilitation when those are needed.

Preventive care still matters

Using TCM does not remove the value of vaccination, cancer screening, blood pressure checks, diabetes monitoring, dental care or other preventive services appropriate for your age and risk. Complementary care works best when it sits beside, rather than replaces, routine prevention and evidence-based follow-up for known conditions.

Transitions are the moments to communicate again

Hospital discharge, surgery, a new specialist, pregnancy, a new diagnosis or a major medicine change are good times to update every practitioner involved. Information that was safe six months ago may no longer be enough. Repeating your current medicine and supplement list during these transitions can prevent avoidable misunderstandings.

CHAPTER 03

Acupuncture: What to Expect Before, During and After a Session



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

Before acupuncture

Have a light meal unless you have been told otherwise, avoid arriving intoxicated and wear clothing that allows access to the treatment area. Tell the practitioner about pregnancy, blood thinners, bleeding disorders and implanted medical devices.

During the session

Needles should be sterile and single-use. People describe sensations differently: some notice pressure, heaviness, tingling or a dull ache. Sharp or intolerable pain should be reported immediately.

After the session

Some people feel relaxed or tired. Move slowly when getting up, drink normally and follow any individual instructions provided. Contact the clinic if you have an unexpected reaction that concerns you.

Safety first

Acupuncture is not a substitute for emergency care. New neurological symptoms, chest pain, breathing difficulty or severe worsening symptoms should be assessed urgently by conventional medical services.

A good session starts before the first needle

Eat normally unless you have been given specific instructions, arrive with enough time to settle, and avoid alcohol before treatment. Wear clothing that gives reasonable access to the area being discussed. Tell the practitioner if you are pregnant, take blood-thinning medicines, have a bleeding disorder, are prone to fainting, have implanted devices or have a condition that changes skin sensation.

What should feel normal - and what should not

People describe acupuncture sensations differently. A brief dull ache, heaviness, tingling or pressure may occur. What matters is communication: sharp, burning, electrical or intolerable pain should be reported immediately. The practitioner can adjust or remove a needle. You do not need to “endure” severe pain to make a treatment effective.

After the appointment

Some people feel relaxed or tired, while others feel little difference immediately. Get up slowly, hydrate normally and follow any individual instructions. Mild local tenderness can occur, but unexpected or concerning reactions should be discussed with the clinic. Acupuncture should complement, not delay, investigation of serious or rapidly worsening symptoms.

Sterile technique matters more than ceremony

Acupuncture needles used in modern clinical practice should be sterile and single-use. The practitioner should clean the relevant area where appropriate, use safe handling technique and dispose of sharps properly. You do not need to understand every infection-control detail, but it is reasonable to expect a clean clinical environment and to ask questions if something makes you uncomfortable.

Point selection is individual, not a fixed recipe

Two people with similar pain can receive different point selections because the practitioner may consider location, movement, other symptoms and the TCM pattern being used. This does not mean every variation is automatically correct. You can still ask what the chosen points are intended to support and how the practitioner will decide whether the approach is helping.

More needles are not automatically better

A session may use only a few needles or more, depending on the treatment plan. Number of needles, stronger sensation and longer retention do not automatically mean a more effective session. The treatment should remain tolerable, and a good practitioner should adapt if you are anxious, sensitive, frail or prone to fainting.

Certain situations deserve extra discussion

Pregnancy, blood-thinning medicines, bleeding disorders, immune suppression, implanted electrical devices, severe skin problems, reduced sensation and a history of fainting can affect how acupuncture is planned. These factors do not always mean acupuncture is impossible, but they should be disclosed before treatment rather than discovered afterwards.

Know what would count as progress

For a recurring problem, decide what improvement means before starting a long course. It may be fewer pain days, easier movement, better sleep or improved function at work. If nothing meaningful changes after a reasonable review period, ask whether the diagnosis, treatment approach or overall plan should be reconsidered.

A course of care should not be open-ended by default

Some problems may justify several sessions, but the number should be linked to a review plan. Ask when the practitioner expects to reassess symptoms and function. If each visit automatically leads to another without any discussion of progress, the treatment plan is incomplete. A reasonable course should have a purpose, a review point and a clear reason for continuing.

Aftercare is usually simple

Most people can return to normal activity after acupuncture unless given individual advice. Mild local soreness or a small bruise can occur. Contact the clinic if something unexpected worries you, and seek medical care for severe or rapidly worsening symptoms. Avoid turning normal aftercare into a long list of unnecessary restrictions unless there is a specific clinical

reason.

CHAPTER 04

Tuina vs Massage: What Is the Difference?

Understand how Tuina is used within TCM, how sessions may differ from relaxation massage and what to discuss before treatment.

Tuina is part of TCM

Tuina uses manual techniques such as pressing, rolling, kneading and mobilisation within a TCM framework. The aim of a session is not necessarily relaxation; techniques are selected according to the practitioner's assessment.

Relaxation massage has a different purpose

General massage may primarily aim to relax muscles and reduce day-to-day tension. Tuina can overlap in some techniques, but its context, assessment and treatment intent are different.

Tell the practitioner about injuries and conditions

Mention recent surgery, fractures, severe osteoporosis, pregnancy, skin conditions, unexplained swelling, numbness or significant pain. Pressure should be adjusted to what is appropriate and tolerable.

Know when hands-on treatment is not the first step

Sudden severe pain, major trauma, weakness, loss of bladder or bowel control, fever with severe illness or other red-flag symptoms should receive prompt medical assessment.

The difference is purpose, not simply pressure

Relaxation massage is usually designed around comfort and general muscle relaxation. Tuina is a manual therapy within TCM, so the practitioner may select pressing, rolling, kneading, mobilisation or other techniques according to an assessment. A Tuina session may therefore feel more targeted, but "stronger" is not automatically "better".

Tell the practitioner about conditions that change what is safe

Recent fractures, acute injuries, significant swelling, severe osteoporosis, blood-thinning medicines, pregnancy, surgery, neurological symptoms and areas with reduced sensation all matter. If pain is sharp, spreading or associated with numbness or weakness, hands-on treatment may not be the right first step until the cause is properly assessed.

Aftercare should be simple

Temporary tenderness can occur after manual therapy, especially when an area was already sensitive. Gentle movement, normal hydration and avoiding aggressive self-massage immediately afterwards may be reasonable. If symptoms become markedly worse, new weakness or numbness appears, or another concerning symptom develops, seek appropriate medical review.

Assessment should come before intensity

Before hands-on treatment, the practitioner should understand the main complaint, recent injuries, medical conditions and any symptoms that could suggest a problem needing medical assessment. A painful area is not automatically a place that should be pressed harder. Sometimes the safest decision is to avoid a technique, modify it or postpone manual treatment until the cause is clearer.

Tuina can use several kinds of manual technique

Depending on the practitioner and purpose, Tuina may involve pressing, rolling, kneading, rubbing, assisted movement or mobilisation. The treatment does not need to feel dramatic. Technique should match the person, the body area and the clinical goal. Older adults, people with fragile skin or bone, and those recovering from injury may need a gentler approach.

Pain during treatment is information, not a challenge

A mild stretching sensation or temporary tenderness can be acceptable, but sharp pain, electrical sensations, sudden numbness, dizziness or a feeling that something is wrong should be reported immediately. You do not earn a better outcome by tolerating unnecessarily painful treatment.

Manual therapy works best with functional goals

Instead of judging a session only by whether the area feels “looser” for an hour, consider useful function: can you turn your head more comfortably, walk farther, sleep better or perform daily tasks with less difficulty? If benefit is brief and repeatedly disappears, the broader plan may need to include exercise, medical assessment or another form of care.

Know when massage-like treatment is not the priority

Major trauma, suspected fracture, new weakness, loss of bladder or bowel control, severe swelling, fever with a painful joint, chest pain or other serious symptoms need appropriate medical care. Complementary manual therapy should not be used to postpone urgent diagnosis.

Preparation can be straightforward

Wear comfortable clothing and explain any area you do not want treated. Avoid arriving immediately after a very heavy meal or after alcohol. Bring relevant medical information when an injury or chronic condition is involved. If you are uncomfortable with a technique, position or level of pressure, say so; consent continues throughout a hands-on session.

Frequency should follow the problem, not a package

Some people may benefit from several sessions while others may need only occasional care or a different approach. Frequency should be linked to the condition, response and functional goals. A prepaid package is not a clinical reason by itself. If progress stalls, the plan should be reviewed rather than simply increasing pressure or extending treatment indefinitely.

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

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 07

Acupressure at Home: A Simple Safety Guide Before You Try It



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

Key points

- Home acupressure should be gentle and should not cause sharp, severe or worsening pain.
- Avoid pressing injured, infected, swollen or otherwise concerning areas without appropriate advice.
- Pregnancy, serious illness or unexplained symptoms are reasons to ask a qualified professional before relying on self-treatment.

Keep the goal modest

Home acupressure is best treated as a comfort or relaxation practice, not a way to diagnose or cure disease. If a point feels pleasant or mildly tender, gentle pressure may be reasonable. If it causes sharp pain, numbness, dizziness or worsening symptoms, stop.

Do not press everything that hurts

Pain can signal injury or illness. Avoid pressing directly on broken skin, obvious infection, fresh injury, significant swelling, a suspected fracture, a lump you do not understand or an area where a doctor has told you to avoid pressure.

Technique can stay simple

Use clean hands, a comfortable position and light-to-moderate pressure. Breathe normally and keep sessions short. More pressure is not automatically better. If you are copying a point from a diagram, remember that body proportions vary and a picture cannot replace an in-person assessment.

Special situations deserve extra caution

Pregnancy, bleeding disorders, blood-thinning medicines, severe osteoporosis, recent surgery and significant medical conditions can change what is appropriate. Ask a qualified healthcare professional or registered TCM practitioner before using techniques that might affect a vulnerable area.

Know when self-care is not enough

Do not use acupressure to delay evaluation of chest pain, severe breathlessness, fainting, sudden weakness, significant injury, severe abdominal pain or rapidly worsening symptoms. For emergencies in Singapore, call 995.

Ask for plain-language explanations

If a TCM term is unfamiliar, ask what it means in everyday language and whether it corresponds to a biomedical diagnosis or is only a traditional pattern description. Also ask about expected benefits, uncertainty, safety, interactions with medicines and when conventional medical care should take priority. Clear explanations are part of good care.

Use the “what, why, how long” rule

For any proposed TCM approach, ask three questions: What exactly are we doing? Why is it being suggested for me? How long should we try it before reviewing whether it is worthwhile? Add a fourth question when medicines or medical conditions are involved: What safety or interaction issues should I know about? These questions make care easier to understand without requiring you to become an expert in TCM terminology.

CHAPTER 08

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.

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.

WhatsApp: +65 8171 6002 | Fortune Centre, 190 Middle Road, Singapore 188979

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