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Acupuncture, Tuina & TCM Treatment Safety

Preparation, comfort, aftercare and when conventional medical review comes first

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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

TCM treatments can feel unfamiliar when you do not know what a session involves or what information changes safety. This guide brings acupuncture, Tuina, moxibustion and home acupressure into one practical handbook, with clear preparation, comfort, review and red-flag guidance.

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

Acupuncture Preparation & Aftercare: A Practical Patient Guide



What to tell your practitioner, how to prepare, what sensations may be normal and what should prompt a review.

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.

CHAPTER 02

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 03

Tuina Session Safety: Pressure, Comfort and When to Speak Up



A practical guide to what Tuina may involve, how pressure should be handled and when manual treatment may not be appropriate.

Tuina is not simply “the stronger the better”

Tuina may include pressing, rolling, kneading, mobilisation and other manual techniques. Intensity should be adapted to the person, the body area and the clinical situation. Strong pain during treatment is not proof that the treatment is effective.

Tell the practitioner about injuries and medical conditions first

Recent fractures, significant swelling, suspected blood clots, severe osteoporosis, neurological symptoms, recent surgery, skin infection and certain pregnancy-related situations can change what is appropriate. Bring relevant reports if you are already under specialist care.

Use a simple comfort scale

A useful session can involve pressure or temporary discomfort, but it should remain controllable. If you are holding your breath, tensing hard, feeling numbness, dizziness or sharp pain, say so immediately so the technique can be adjusted.

After the session, judge function rather than soreness

Temporary muscle tenderness can happen. More useful questions are whether movement, sleep or daily function improves over time. New weakness, numbness, significant swelling or rapidly worsening pain deserves medical assessment rather than repeated stronger massage.

A treatment plan needs a review point

If Tuina is being used for recurring pain, agree on what will be reviewed after several sessions. Continuing indefinitely without checking function, diagnosis or progress is not a complete plan.

Manual therapy should complement, not replace, necessary diagnosis

Pain after trauma, unexplained neurological symptoms, fever with severe pain, loss of bladder or bowel control and other red flags require conventional medical evaluation. Tuina should not delay that process.

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

Moxibustion & Heat Therapy: Comfort, Ventilation and Safety



How moxibustion uses heat, what to tell your practitioner and why skin sensation and ventilation matter.

Moxibustion is a heat-based therapy

Moxibustion traditionally uses processed mugwort to provide heat near selected areas. The practical safety questions are straightforward: how close the heat is, whether the person can feel it normally, how long exposure lasts and whether the room is appropriately ventilated.

Reduced sensation changes the risk

Diabetes with neuropathy, nerve injury, very fragile skin, reduced consciousness and certain circulatory problems can make burns harder to notice. Tell the practitioner if you have altered sensation or a history of poor wound healing.

Heat should feel controlled, not threatening

Warmth may be expected; burning, stinging or intolerable heat is not something to endure. Speak up early. The treatment can be moved, stopped or adjusted before skin injury occurs.

Smoke and ventilation deserve practical attention

Traditional moxa can produce smoke and odour. People with asthma, respiratory sensitivity or strong smoke intolerance should discuss this in advance. Smokeless alternatives or other approaches may be considered depending on the situation.

After treatment, inspect the skin

Mild warmth or temporary redness may occur. Blistering, persistent pain, marked swelling or skin damage should be assessed. Do not apply additional heat to an area that already feels irritated.

Not every symptom needs another therapy added

Moxibustion should have a clear reason for being included. It is reasonable to ask what it is intended to support, what precautions matter and how the practitioner will decide whether it is useful.

CHAPTER 06

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 07

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 08

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.

Practical consultation checklist

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

Contact Shande

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

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References & further reading

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

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