

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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The first clinical description of diabetes mellitus is said to have come from Aretaeus the Cappadocian – a Greek physician – in about 150AD. He described diabetes as “a melting down of flesh and limbs into urine. Patients never stop making water, but the flow is incessant”.

He also calls it a disease associated with excessive drinking. In ancient China, the definition of a similar disease – *Xiao Ke* (consumptive thirst) – can be found in the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) book *Huang Di Nei Jing* (about 200 BC). It, too, lists symptoms such as excessive drinking and a need to urinate frequently.

The World Health Organisation says about 177 million people worldwide had diabetes in 2000 and predicts there'll be at least 300 million cases by 2025.

In 1997, a study in Hong Kong found almost one in 10 adults aged 25 to 74 had diabetes, but most didn't know they had it.

Typical symptoms of diabetes include excessive urination, thirst and tiredness.

Diabetes occurs when the body can't make enough insulin or can't properly use the insulin it makes. Without insulin, sugar in the blood can't be absorbed and used by the body's cells and this raises blood sugar levels.

Complications from diabetes include blindness, kidney failure, cardiovascular disease, sensory loss and limb damage.

So how does TCM view diabetes? It regards it as “hyperactive fire” due to a *yin* and *chi* deficiency.

Signs of this disharmony – apart from those already mentioned – include a dislike of heat, emotional imbalances, dark yellow urine, constipation, shortness of breath, heart

palpitations, spontaneous sweating and trouble sleeping.

TCM practitioners commonly prescribe Chinese yam for diabetics. The herb is believed to strengthen organs weakened by diabetes such as the spleen, lungs and kidneys.

TCM also uses animals' organs in recipes to fortify the corresponding organs in humans.

Using a pig's pancreas and 30g of Chinese yam, a soup can be made to strengthen organs, but it won't control high blood sugar levels. For TCM and western medicine, diabetes is a complicated disease related to genetics and lifestyle, and prevention is the best form of defence. The preventive approach of TCM is similar to western medicine.

Grains, fat and sugar should be consumed in moderation, and an assortment of vegetables and beans with a moderate amount of lean meat and eggs is recommended.

Avoid cigarettes, alcohol, black tea and coffee as these can create more heat evils which cause further *yin* and *chi* exhaustion and aggravate diabetic symptoms.