

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Up to scratch

In traditional Chinese medicine, treating a scratch isn't just a matter of applying a plaster.

TCM regards the body as an organic whole, with the internal and the external connected by channels (meridians). Superficial lesions – such as scratches or bites – are said to be influenced by the internal system.

In TCM, external diseases can be caused by such things as the six evils (wind, cold, summer heat, dampness, dryness and fire), the emotions and improper diet.

According to TCM,

once a superficial lesion has developed, pathogens will first disturb the circulation of nearby muscles, tendons or bones and result in redness, swelling, heat or pain.

If the pathogens reach the organs, systemic illness will appear. As it progresses, stagnant blood and *chi* (energy) transform into fire evils, which give rise to tissue death and pus. After a pus-filled sore bursts, tissue regenerates and the sore closes and heals.

Abundance of blood and *chi* not only facilitates the formation and release of pus, it also promotes the regeneration and healing of a wound. Depletion of blood and *chi* slows the cycle and prevents healing.

Crucial factors that need attention include blockages of *chi* and blood, disturbed flow

and organ disharmony. Diagnosis of the underlying disharmony should be carried out by a qualified practitioner.

Apart from treatment with herbal prescriptions, herbs can be applied as pastes or powders. Freshly ground dandelion, Tokyo violet herbs, cotton rose leaves and wild chrysanthemum leaves can be applied to the infection to help clear heat

and relieve swelling. Other external methods include acupuncture, moxibustion, herbal compresses and washing. The last entails herbs being decocted with water, wine or vinegar and the liquid used to clean the area.

TCM says this can help dissolve swelling and relieve pain. It can also be used for skin allergies and acne. A vinegar solution in which alum, light yellow

sophora root and common cnidium fruit have been soaked, for example, is used to wash hands and feet in fungal infection.

Acupuncture is usually used to relieve pain and promote urination after surgery. Moxibustion (a hand-held device with a herb that's lit and then burned down on the skin) is used when a wound doesn't heal due to poor immune function.

Herbal compresses use a mixture of herbs that are stir-fried and sprinkled with wine or vinegar. The heated bundle is then massaged on to the affected area. This is used for sprains and strains, stiffness and inflammation by stimulating the blood circulation.

*Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner*