

HEALTH

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TCM: Kicking up a stink

As anyone on a peak-hour train knows, body odour can be a problem. And it's particularly hard to smell sweet in Hong Kong's humid climate.

Sweat is odourless, but if it is left on the skin, the bacteria that normally live on the skin break it down. This releases chemicals that create an unpleasant smell. Some areas of the skin, such as the armpits and genitals, are more likely to produce body odour because the sweat glands in these areas are different, producing substances that bacteria thrive on.

In TCM, body odour has a constitutional character that is hereditary. However, for those who become really smelly, their bodies are usually in disharmony between the blood and *qi*. The liver meridians, which start at the toes and run bilaterally up to the head, aid the distribution of damp-heat pathogens and cause some regions of the body to have a stronger odour.

Techniques for TCM physicians to treat body odour include harmonising the blood and *qi*, controlling the sweating process, clearing the skin and using aromatic herbs to mask the odour.

Physicians will design a comprehensive plan to suit the individual. For people diagnosed with damp heat in the liver meridian, herbs such as bupleurum root, virgate wormwood herb and spreading hedyotis, will be prescribed; abnormal perspiration can be kept in check by fresh rhemannia root, schisandra and smoked plum; aromatic herbs to mask body odour include schizonepeta, agastache, clove, dahurian angelica root and cassia bark. The herbs are given orally or in external applications.

A body wash preparation includes schizonepeta herb (30g), agastache

(30g), clove (15g), golden thread rhizome (15g), alum powder (20g) and virgate wormwood herb (30g), which is decocted to a 2,000ml solution and used for washing the armpits, genitals, nipples and navel.

Some external remedies, especially folk remedies, may contain mineral compounds such as lead and sulphur or irritating herbs that can cause undesirable reactions, so be cautious about using them.

Body odour may also be due to diet: the body's sweat glands, such as curry, garlic and other strong spices. Pungent, spicy and fried foods should be eaten in

moderation. Food such as melons, beans, coix seed, snail meat and carp are beneficial as they help eliminate accumulated pathogens through urination. You should also bathe at least once a day.

Since excessive sweat or pungent body odour can be a sign of an underlying body disharmony, it's a good idea to have a checkup.

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