



# Chinese Whispers

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Trying to find the right treatment for a sick child can be a frightening and stressful experience for a parent. We wish we could 'kiss it better' and be miraculous healers, but all too often we end up frantically calling NHS Direct or rushing to our GP. Whilst these conventional methods of treatment provide vital emergency care and can be useful in the short-term resolution of problems, many parents are increasingly turning to 'alternative' medicine as either a complementary treatment, or as a stand-alone means of treating their children. For those parents who want something different, the answer could lie with Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Skilled practitioners of this ancient form of medicine (known as TCM) have successfully treated a wide range of diseases: from curing common complaints such as eczema, asthma, bedwetting and acne, to alleviating the symptoms of HIV, cancer and Down's Syndrome. It can even be used with premature babies to strengthen their vulnerable immune systems and stimulate their appetites. If a child suffers from acute illness or allergies, TCM could offer them the relief they haven't been able to find elsewhere.

The basic method of treatment begins with an in-depth consultation, in which the practitioner will observe the patient's external manifestations of the complaint. To a trained eye much can be gleaned from a well poked-out tongue and a feel of the pulse!

The practitioner builds up a 'pattern diagnosis' to determine exactly where the illness is coming from. Unlike the Western medical approach, which basically treats each symptom individually, TCM aims to find patterns which reveal where the body is out of balance in order get to the root of the problems presented. For example, we might go to the doctor with a cough, but a TCM practitioner would explore exactly what kind of cough we have; children suffering from asthma very often also have eczema, and TCM would treat these illnesses in conjunction. Where Western allopathic medicine looks to suppress specific symptoms TCM treats the whole body, through a combination of herbs (often using up to 15 at a time to address each aspect of imbalance), tuina massage, acupuncture (or acupressure in the very young) and dietary / lifestyle changes. The initial consultation will be followed by weekly visits until the symptoms improve, increasing to every two weeks until the patient is cured.

According to Robert Helmer, the UK's only dedicated paediatric practitioner of TCM, "Chinese medicine can offer substantial benefits to patients who have been unresponsive to other forms of treatment. In my experience these treatments are effective, safe and easy to use. In clinical practice, I use TCM as both a complementary form of medicine for those who are using modern medicine and an