

Dishes planned by physicians

People should not wait till they are sick before they attempt to eat healthily.

In TCM, food, including herbs, is also medicine, and they can be used to restore balance and flow of blood and qi (vital energy) in the body to prevent and treat various ailments.

With this in mind, Professor Hong Hai, a TCM physician, opened a herbal cafe above his clinic, The Renhai Clinic in Neil Road, in January.

A physician is always on hand at the cafe to offer advice to customers, who do not have to be patients at the clinic, on what food or teas may be more suitable for them.

There are many factors to consider: an individual's constitution, the nature of any illness or syndrome, and even the weather.

Advice is dished out after asking about a customer's symptoms and through a quick observation of his tongue, though this is not an actual clinical assessment which would include taking a person's pulse.

With a floor area of 1,200 sq ft, Herbal Oasis@Duxton can seat about 50 people. There is a private room that people can book for meetings. Reservations are recommended.

The cafe currently serves about 15 to 20 customers a day, said Ms Karen Wee, a TCM physician at the same clinic.

MENU EXPANDED

Prof Hong, a senior fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies and an adjunct professor at the College of Business at Nanyang Technological University, said he initially planned to offer teas and desserts only.

But he soon expanded his menu to include set lunches.

A set comprises a rice, soup and a side dish of meat and/or vegetables at a cost of \$15 onwards.

For instance, a set could comprise olive rice, Chinese angelica (danggui) and longan in duck soup and luffa melon with black fungus meatballs.

Ms Wee, who helped to plan the menu, said olive is known in TCM to have heat-clearing properties.

In mainstream science, it has also been shown to be rich in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids which help to lower a person's risk of heart disease.

As for the soup, Chinese angelica and longan complement each other in their properties. The former promotes blood flow while longan addresses any blood deficiency in the body which can lead to insomnia.



ST PHOTO: MATTHIAS HO

Professor Hong Hai and Ms Karen Wee, both TCM physicians at The Renhai Clinic, showing off two set meals offered at Herbal Oasis@Duxton, located above their clinic. The first set meal (left) comprises olive rice, bittergourd cooling soup and poached spinach with wolfberries. The second comprises walnut brown rice, black chicken herbal soup and luffa melon with black fungus meatballs.

As blood is considered a yin (the element responsible for cooling organs) element of the body, the soup also nourishes yin and promotes a healthy glow in the skin.

Close to 30 people were invited for tasting sessions last August to help refine the menu. Prof Hong said feedback from male customers that there should be more meat dishes prompted them to add meatballs to the luffa melon dish.

Ms Wee said black fungus promotes smooth blood flow in the body and the luffa melon dish helps to cool a "heaty" disposition.

To cater to regular customers, the menu changes every day and has at least two choices in each set meal category.

Each day, the cafe also offers at least two of four types of pastries – red date muffin, apple cinnamon muffin, black sesame muffin with lemon and banana walnut cake – and five types of herbal teas.

Some of these include tea for clear vision (mulberry leaves, wolfberries and chrysanthemum flowers) and good digestion (tangerine peel and germinated barley).

Ms Wee said the dishes are prepared using healthy cooking

methods such as steaming, poaching, boiling and stir-frying.

Regular customers Krystal Khor, a 40-year-old real estate agent and her assistant, Claire Yeo, 49, visit the cafe about three times a week for lunch.

Ms Khor said she opts mostly for the "cooling" dishes to help balance her "heaty" body – a result of frequent sun exposure and late nights attending to her two-year-old daughter.

She lets her toddler eat the red date muffin as it does not contain cream and is not too sweet.

Ms Yeo said she finds cooking herbal soups too troublesome, and is glad she can enjoy them hassle-free at the cafe. She gave the food an overall thumbs up.

She said: "Yam rice which is overcooked will be mushy, but not the version served here. I can still taste the yam chunks."

**Herbal Oasis@Duxton
27A Neil Road**

*Opening hours: 11.30am to 6.30pm,
Mondays to Saturdays
Tel: 6221-8798*

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