

DIETARY HEALING & LIFESTYLE SUGGESTIONS ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Ancient Chinese wisdom states that food and lifestyle habits are nature's first medicine. Depending on the nature of a food and the way it is prepared, it can heal or harm certain health conditions when consumed in particular quantities over time. Also, depending on a person's presentation, certain activities may be beneficial when practiced on a regular basis to improve the abundance and flow of qi (energy) in the body.

Traditional Chinese Medicine looks at peoples' health conditions according to a multitude of signs and symptoms that fit into categories. Most people have symptoms from more than one category, although it is typical that one or two categories are predominant. In order to benefit from the dietary and lifestyle advice contained herein, it is recommended that you consider which of the following categories you align with most according to your signs and symptoms and then follow the recommended dietary advice as consistently as possible. You can also, of course, ask Justine which of these plans would be best for you.

THE FOLLOWING DIETARY BASICS APPLY TO EVERYONE:

Eat whole, unprocessed foods whenever possible. Warm, cooked, bland or sweet natured foods are best for all people. Cold foods and drinks, raw foods and certain spices are only suggested for selected individuals according to their constitution, and should be used in moderate amounts.

Avoid overeating or undereating. It is advised to be in touch with your body and eat to 70% capacity at any one meal. It is ideal to consume several small meals a day.

Avoid drinking a lot of fluid before or during a meal. Try drinking the bulk of your fluids between meals rather than during meals. One teacup or small mug is the recommended amount to have with a meal. Drinking while eating waters down the digestive juices, inhibiting digestive function.

Chew thoroughly to aid in digestion.

Follow the dietary recommendations that fit your primary pattern. Avoid "NO" foods as much as possible for the best possible results.

JOURNALING: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL

You may want to try keeping an eating/exercise/health journal for two to four weeks or more to see how your diet and lifestyle habits make you feel. Start by writing down the times of day that you ate and what you ate, the times of day you engaged in physical activity and what type, if you had acupuncture and/or were taking Chinese herbs, how much energy you have, how your digestion and elimination feels, how your sleep and mood feel and any other symptoms pertaining to your health and well-being that you are able to notice. This will help you to identify your sensitivities and the way your body responds to certain foods and activities.

DIAGNOSTIC CATEGORIES AND DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

DEFICIENT SPLEEN AND/OR LUNG QI

Symptoms: lethargy, fatigue, worsened fatigue after vigorous activity, weakness, shortness of breath, asthma, allergies, low immunity/tendency to catch colds, decreased appetite, loose stools.

Your diet should contain the following:

YES: 50% of total calories from grains and legumes, 30% from vegetables, 15 % from meat (but eat only 2–3 oz meat per meal to avoid taxing the digestive system) and 5% from dairy. Recommended foods include rice, barley, rye, broth, soups, stews, leeks, garlic, green beans, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, carrots, yams and winter squash, cooked fruit, chicken, turkey and white fish, green tea and barley tea.

NO: raw food, chilled food/drinks (directly from refrigerator or freezer), beer, juice, sugar, honey and sweets. Consume very sparingly/rarely salads, tomatoes and raw fruits and eat them only when at room temperature, not cold.

Lifestyle: Moderate exercise (such as light–moderate cardio or yoga 30–45 minutes, 3–6 times a week) is beneficial, as are breathing exercises and tai chi. The key with exercise is to do just enough to feel good, but not too much as to feel fatigued. Eat several small meals a day instead of fewer larger meals. If you are dealing with grief or worry excessively, it is advised to seek professional help or join a support group to work through these difficulties.

DEFICIENT QI WITH COLD

Symptoms: above plus cold extremities and/or limbs.

Your diet should contain Spleen Qi Deficiency Diet PLUS the following:

ADD dried and fresh ginger, dried and fresh garlic, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, black pepper, nutmeg and eggs to the above diet to warm and improve circulation.

Lifestyle: follow Spleen/Lung qi deficiency lifestyle recommendations.

SPLEEN QI DEFICIENCY WITH DAMPNES AND/OR PHLEGM

Symptoms: lethargy, fatigue, weakness, dull headaches, cloudy/foggy head, sinus congestion, sinus pressure, chronic sinus issues, post nasal drip, chronic cough with phlegm, gas and bloating, nausea, loose pasty stools, yeast infections. Symptoms may be worse on damp or humid days. Dampness is common in overweight individuals.

Your diet should contain Spleen Qi Deficiency Diet PLUS the following:

YES: Cooked grains and vegetables, ESPECIALLY rice, barley, rye, corn, adzuki beans, mung beans, mushrooms, mustard greens, scallions, garlic.

NO: salt, sugar, pork, dairy, soymilk, tofu, wheat, nuts, olives, oils, nut butters, greasy food, raw food, frozen food/drinks, beer. Consume very sparingly/rarely salads, tomatoes and raw fruits and eat them only when at room temperature, not cold.

Lifestyle: Avoid overeating, only eat until 70% full at each sitting. Follow Spleen/Lung qi deficiency lifestyle recommendations.

LIVER QI STAGNATION

Symptoms: tension, tight tense muscles especially in the neck/shoulder region or rib cage, tension headaches, boost in energy after vigorous activity, tendency toward irritability, depression, insomnia with waking at 1–3 AM, gas, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, sluggish/incomplete bowel movements or IBS, PMS with emotional or physical components such as breast tenderness, cramps and constipation before the period/looser stool with the period, insomnia before the period.

Your diet should contain the following:

Spleen Qi diet PLUS the following

YES: basil, bay leaves, beets, black pepper, cabbage, garlic, ginger, leeks, peaches, scallions and rosemary. Occasional salads and raw foods (not chilled or frozen) are okay (5–10% of diet).

NO: alcohol, spicy food, vinegar, tomatoes, coffee, fried foods, red meat, sugar.

Lifestyle: The keyword for those with stagnant Liver qi is RELAX. Find ways to enjoy your life and take it easy. Exercising (especially cardio and yoga – but don't overdo it and exhaust yourself), watching funny movies, deep breathing sessions and releasing your emotions are essential and help the qi flow freely, easing tension-related health conditions. You may want to consider meditation or tai chi. Acupuncture on a regular basis is extremely valuable for those who suffer from Liver qi stagnation. If you are dealing with difficult life issues, seeing a therapist or joining a self-help group is recommended. If you feel irritable and need to yell, let it out! It's better for your health than it is to let it get pent up.

LIVER FIRE

Symptoms: include Liver qi stagnation symptoms with more exacerbated irritability, tendency to have outbursts, anger and rage, tendency to feeling hot, red in the face, headaches, excessive hunger, excessive thirst, 1–3 AM insomnia, coughing when emotional, GERD, constipation or diarrhea.

Liver Qi stagnation diet PLUS the following:

YES: Lettuce, celery, cucumbers, mango, pears, spinach, tomatoes,

NO: alcohol, spicy food, coffee, fried foods, red meat, sugar.

Lifestyle: Follow suggestions for Liver Qi Stagnation (above).

HEAT

Symptoms: feeling hot, sweatiness, thirsty, heartburn/GERD, dark scanty urine, bad breath, constipation, irritability, anger and/or rage, redness of the face, severe headaches, restless sleep, red itchy skin conditions.

Your diet should contain the following:

YES: 50% of total calories from grains and legumes, 30% from raw and cooked vegetables and 20% from fruits and juices. Steamed and lightly sautéed foods are best.

NO: Frozen foods and drinks, alcohol, spicy foods, shellfish, fried foods. Minimize meat, dairy and sugar.

Lifestyle: regular physical exercise and care with the diet is key, especially the avoidance of foods that will cause further heat. Chinese herbal medicine is extremely helpful in cooling down a hot system fairly quickly.

DAMP HEAT

Symptoms: feeling hot, sweating, heavy feeling of the body, bloating, gas, nausea, bad breath, red itchy moist skin conditions, gallstones, kidney stones, chronic UTIs or interstitial cystitis, yeast infections, premature ejaculation or impotence, foul smelling loose stools. Damp heat is common in overweight individuals.

Your diet should contain the following:

YES: 70% of calories from grains and legumes, 30% from cooked vegetables (especially steamed leafy greens), 5% from white meats. 2 to 3 salads a week are suggested. Raw, room temperature melons, watermelon and cucumbers and lightly cooked watercress, celery, carrots, cranberries are suggested.

NO: Red meat, dairy, fruit juice, sugar. Use raw vegetables moderately. Use oils sparingly.

Lifestyle: regular physical exercise and care with the diet is key, especially the avoidance of foods that will cause further dampness and heat.

YIN DEFICIENCY WITH HEAT

Symptoms: hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia with waking in the middle of the night, restless sleep, frequent scanty urine, chronic UTIs or interstitial cystitis, constipation with dry hard stool, heartburn/GERD, possible low back, knee and/or ankle pain or weakness, dry skin. Most common in menopausal women or older individuals. Yin deficient people tend to be thin. (If an individual is both yin deficient and damp, they may be overweight and suffer from both yin deficiency and dampness. Yin deficient and damp types should follow the Spleen qi deficiency diet).

Your diet should include:

YES: Soups, stews, cooked vegetables, grains including rice, oats and wheat, eggs, white and dark meat poultry, fish, liver, cooked fruits. Steamed and lightly sautéed foods are best.

NO: sugars, sweets, alcohol, coffee, stimulants, spices.

Lifestyle: Take care not to mentally or physically overwork, but do take care to exercise regularly and moderately. Because yin deficiency tends to arise with aging, Chinese herbal medicine is extremely helpful in nourishing yin and cooling heat, particularly when taken over the course of several months.

BLOOD DEFICIENCY

Symptoms: includes short scanty flowing periods that may be late or irregular, amenorrhea (loss of periods), tend to feeling cold, fatigue, dizziness, palpitations, blurred vision, difficulty falling asleep, constipation, dry hair and nails, insufficient lactation after childbirth. Blood deficiency is common in women, vegetarians and vegans with poorly balanced diets and/or those who exercise excessively. May also occur from long standing qi deficiency. If you are a vegetarian, use care to ensure your diet is properly balanced. It is recommended that you see your doctor to test for anemia, and if anemic, improve your diet and/or take iron supplements as recommended.

Your diet should include the following:

YES: Spleen Qi diet (above) plus chicken soup, eggs, oysters and an abundance of leafy greens such as spinach and kale. A moderate amount of red meat is also recommended.

NO: raw food, cold foods and drinks.

LIFESTYLE: afternoon naps are advised whenever possible, as are full nights of sleep, since in Chinese medicine the blood has a chance to be produced and circulate while asleep. Moderate physical activity such as walking, short cardio sessions (30 minutes max.) and yoga are advised. Listen to your body and rest when you feel fatigued. A well-balanced diet is essential. Chinese herbal medicine, when used over the course of several months, can be extremely helpful in building up deficient blood as well. When you rebuild up your blood stores, you will feel better and will be able to resume greater amounts of physical activity.

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