

EARLY WINTER RECOMMENDATIONS

By early winter, the storage of the summer crop is complete. We

now live off of what has been put away, and nothing more. This means we too are meant to put away activity and practice non-action, to reduce our output.

Winter is a natural time for things to die off: as the days shorten and frost and snow appear, it is natural for us to simplify, to return to routine, to do things as they have always been done, according to tradition. Straining and exerting ourselves in the winter is a kind of denial, and only creates illness.

To remain healthy during the winter, it is important that we not push out the yang we have stored (through doing too much), but keep it nourished within. As we draw our energy inward, the protective qi on the surface of our bodies (wei qi) is able to solidify and guard us like a stockade from wind, colds and flus. To help us reduce vulnerability to illness during this season of erratic weather, consider following these recommendations:

- **Slow down:** as the fluids in our bodies crystallize like the frost, we too should curtail excess activity, postpone, relax, give up on ideas of progress, conserve energy

- **Practice gratitude:** it is time now to reflect on the legacy of our ancestors, and to be grateful for our lives



ACCORDING TO CHINESE MEDICINE, the best way for us to maintain health is to have an appropriate **RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT.** In addition to acupuncture and Chinese herbs, learning to live harmoniously with natural, seasonal cycles can be a powerful way of promoting our wellness and resolving illness.

If we can **ALLOW OUR BODIES TO ADAPT** to the different seasons, to the qi as it changes throughout the year, then health will flow naturally. Taoists closely observed the **NATURAL QI CYCLES** of 24 different seasons in order to harmonize their energy with that of their environment. The following daily practices and dietary recommendations are based on this tradition.

- **Rest:** sleep longer, nap regularly, rest when you are tired
- **Meditate:** now is an excellent time to go on retreat, and to include a contemplative practice as part of your daily routine
- **Practice not knowing:** go with your instincts, withdraw from constant analysis, create more quiet time and give your mind a rest



FOOD RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECIPES

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Winter is a time of cold and yin — a time when the yang of the body is stored deep within. To maintain balance in early winter, it's appropriate to eat warming foods that enhance our internal yang, and foods cooked slowly so as to release their inner nature — and which will then go deep within and nourish us. This is the season of the water element (kidneys), which manages our body fluids and is nourished by the salty flavor; salty and bitter flavors draw energy inwards and downwards, and are appropriate to use more as the weather gets colder. Beans too are associated with the kidneys, and nourish us well this time of year. During winter, meals should also be larger, heartier, and cooked with higher heat — try occasional roasting, baking and frying in addition to eating lots of soups and stews.

Foods to emphasize: root vegetables (winter squash, carrots, onions, parsnips, turnips, burdock, yams), daikon, garlic, ginger, rice, barley, cabbage, collards, kale, mustard greens, brussel sprouts, green onion, beef, beef bones (marrow), pork, chicken, lamb, buffalo, beans (aduki, black, pinto, kidney), dried shiitake mushrooms, chestnut, escarole, leeks, persimmons.

Avoid: raw foods, cold foods, lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach, melons, chili peppers, coffee, excessive alcohol and sweets.

Simple Soups for Winter

Aduki Bean Ginger Soup

- 1 cup aduki beans, soaked
- 1 quart water
- 3 tablespoons ginger, grated
- 3 inch piece of kombu
- Tamari to taste
- Scallion garnish

Bring soaked beans, water and kombu to boil. Simmer for 1 hour, or until very soft. Blend soup with ginger juice and tamari. Garnish with thinly sliced scallions.

Mushroom Barley Soup

- ½ cup barley, soaked
- 5 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 beef short rib
- small diced: onions, carrots, celery
- salt and white pepper to taste
- fresh parsley, chopped, as garnish

Bring barley, 1 quart water and beef short rib to boil. Simmer for 1 hour or until barley is cooked. Add onions, carrots and celery and sliced shiitake mushrooms. Simmer until vegetables are cooked, approximately ½ hour. Remove meat from rib and add back to soup. Season with salt and white pepper; garnish with freshly chopped parsley.

Many thanks to Liu Ming's "Nourishing Within" classes (www.dayuancircle.com) from which this information was derived.