

Kitchen WISDOM





In the Chinese tradition, healing with food is one of the major branches of medicine. The earth element (spleen and stomach, which are responsible for digestion) is central to the health of all other organs; proper nutrition is essential for overall health, and it is the foundation that allows acupuncture and herbs to be fully effective.

Although each person's diet should take into consideration their constitution, the condition being treated, the season, and a number of other factors, some basic principles apply for almost everyone:

GRAIN-BASED DIET

The foundation of stable health is stable blood and qi. A grain-based diet is essential for this kind of stability, and for the proper functioning of herbal medicines. The traditional Chinese diet of grain (rice or noodles), greens, and a small amount of meat is a good model for this.

SOUP

A small amount of savory soup at the beginning of a meal stimulates the appetite and begins the process of digestion, allowing the body to more easily assimilate the rest of the meal.

FERMENTED FOODS

As in many traditional cultures, small quantities of fermented foods (pickles, sauerkraut, miso, etc.) consumed on a regular basis are highly beneficial for digestion.

SALT

A moderate amount of salt helps maintain proper circulation of fluids. However, refined or iodized salt is not beneficial. Instead, use good quality sea salt, which contains vital minerals.

BREAKFAST

A warm breakfast every day is important for the stability of blood and qi, and for overall digestive health. Hot cereal such as rice porridge (jook or congee) or oatmeal is ideal, but any savory meal will work well. The heaviest meals of the day should be breakfast and lunch, followed by a lighter dinner early in the evening (with no late snacks).

AVOID SUGAR

White sugar and other refined sweeteners go directly into our bloodstream, bypassing the digestive process. Consequently, our bodies forget how to digest other foods and we lose the ability to assimilate nutrients. This ability to assimilate is more important than the “food value” of what we consume – it is the very core of digestive health.



FOOD SELECTION

- Eat out infrequently; learn to cook
- Emphasize seasonal, local, organic foods
- Emphasize organic / grass-fed meat or fowl and wild-caught fish
- Avoid iced drinks, frozen desserts, and cold foods straight from the refrigerator
- Avoid excessive fat (especially saturated and trans), alcohol, salt, sweeteners, and caffeine
- Select foods with a variety of different flavors and colors
- Eat simply, and avoid processed or refined foods: the shorter the ingredient list the better
- Eat flexibly: thinking is associated with the spleen and stomach, which are also the center of digestion; rigid thinking damages the digestion, so excessively restrictive diets do more harm than good

FOOD PREPARATION

- Use a variety of cooking methods: try steaming, boiling, poaching, pickling, stir-frying, stewing, roasting, grilling, and water-sautéing
- Emphasize cooked vegetables rather than salads and raw produce
- Use as little oil as possible: high-heat oils (tea oil, unrefined sunflower oil) are best for cooking; virgin olive oil and toasted sesame oil are appropriate as finishing sauces

EATING

- Don't eat to capacity: stop eating when 70-80% full
- If you eat meat, do so in moderate quantities – as a side dish or soup stock
- Eat slowly and mindfully – not while reading, driving, or watching television
- Enjoy meals with others
- Chew well: “drink” your food
- Take a short walk after eating
- Eat fruit or dessert as its own meal, preferably two hours before or after other foods
- Don't drink with meals

PROPERTIES OF COMMON FOODS

“Kitchen medicine” has been practiced in Chinese households for centuries as a way of maintaining health. Each food item has a “nature:” foods of a cool nature can be helpful for people with warm diseases, hot constitutions, or during hot seasons – and vice versa.

Practitioners often disagree about whether a particular food is cold, neutral, or hot. However, common sense and awareness of our bodies and of the natural world provide the most reliable information: rich foods can cause damp congestion, spicy foods are often warming, and food often takes on the properties of the environment in which it grows. What follows is a list of the properties of some common food items:



COLD

Bamboo shoots
Banana
Cantaloupe
Clams
Cod
Crab
Lemon
Lettuce (romaine)

Lotus root
Miso
Red snapper
Seaweed
(nori, hijiki,
kombu, agar
agar, arame,
wakame)

Sea salt
Spinach
Tomato
Water chestnut
Watermelon

COOL

Apples
Avocado
Barley
Basil
Bean curd (tofu)
Bean thread
noodles
Bell pepper
Buckwheat
Celery
Coconut

Cucumber
Grapefruit
Halibut
Ham
Lettuce
Millet
Mint
Mung beans
Mushroom
(button)
Olive oil

Pears
Persimmons
Radish
Sesame oil
Squash
(Summer)
Tea
Thyme
Watercress
Wheat
- wheat gluten

NEUTRAL

Almond
Apricots
Asparagus
Azuki (aduki) beans
Basil
Beef
Beets
Mushroom
(shiitake)

Black sesame seeds
Black beans
Brussel sprout
Buffalo
Burdock root
Cabbage
Carrot
Cauliflower
Cheese

Chicken egg
Corn (vegetable)
Duck
Eggplant
Fennel
Figs
Fungus - black
Grapes
Green beans



NEUTRAL CONTINUED

Kidney beans
Lima beans
Mango
Oats
Parsnip
Peanut
Peas
Plums
Pork

Potato
Pumpkin
Raspberry
Rice
Rye
Soy sauce
Squash - winter
(acorn, butternut,
kabocha)

Sweet potato
Tangerine
Taro root
Turnip
White pepper
Yam
Yogurt

WARM

Anchovy
Anise
Artichoke
Bay leaf
Beef marrow
Beer
Butter
Cherry
Chestnut
Chicken meat
Chives
Cilantro
Coffee

Coriander
Corn (maize)
Curly endive
Dandelion greens
Dates
Eel
Garlic
Ginger
Goat
Honey
Kale
Lamb
Mustard greens

Nutmeg
Oils
(safflower,
sunflower)
Onion - all
Orange
Peach
Pine nut
Salmon
Sardine
Squash - winter
Strawberry
Vinegar
Walnut

HOT (TOXIC)

Alcohol
Black pepper
Chili peppers
Chocolate

Margarine
Nuts, if not
properly stored
Peanut oil

Shellfish
Soy oil
Trout
Turkey

CAUSE DAMPNES

Alcohol	Oranges
Avocado	Sugar, honey, and
Bamboo shoots	other concentrated
Banana	sweeteners
Dairy products	Overeating
Granola	
Nuts	
Oil, fried foods	

APPETITE

The most important component of healthy eating is to follow your real appetite. However, amidst heavy marketing, fad diets, and conflicting information, most of us have lost touch with this essential relationship with ourselves. The above guidelines are just that — a guide toward re-establishing our natural sense of what is healthy and right for us. These basic concepts are important for health, but more importantly, are a route to self-knowledge; use these guidelines as a way to **KNOW YOURSELF AND YOUR BODY, YOUR NATURAL RHYTHMS AND REAL SENSE OF SELF**. Go to a farmer's market and select what appeals most to you; take it home and cook it and **SEE HOW IT FEELS TO NOURISH YOURSELF**. Experiment with food, and find what most sustains you. Ultimately, follow what feels most right for you — be true to your appetite, with food and in all aspects of your life.