

# WINTER SOLSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

**In the deep of winter,** the days are at their shortest and the air is cold and dry. This is the most still time of year. No matter what the actual weather, the available energy at this time is less dynamic than during other seasons. Plants are consolidating and storing their energy deep in their roots. As it gets colder and as the energy contracts, the fluids in our body thicken to protect us and we naturally slow down. Our energy goes inward to keep us warm.

## **In Chinese medicine,**

the kidneys are associated with winter. They are the deepest organs, holding the root energy of the body. Winter is an excellent time to access this energy in order to resolve deep, chronic health patterns, which are often associated with the kidneys. To replenish kidney energy and use the energy of winter properly, consider following these recommendations:

- **Decrease outward activity:** simplify, do less
- **Routinize activities:** eat at the same time every day, exercise at the same time, go to bed at the same time
- **Rest more:** sleep an

hour longer, go to bed early and rise when the sun comes up, take naps

- **Be still:** self-reflect, go inward, allow your mind to be more quiet
- **Consolidate:** wait until spring to plan and push

forward, now is a time to store rather than initiate

- **Don't overexert yourself:** sweat minimally, emphasize contemplative exercises such as qi gong, tai ji, and gentle yoga, which are especially beneficial if practiced as part of one's daily routine

- **Honor your ancestors:** learn and tell stories about your family, spend time at home with loved ones

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.





# FOOD RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECIPES

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## *As the weather gets colder,*

nutrients recede from the surface of the plants and go deeper. To access those nutrients, cook food longer and more slowly, with even heat (ceramic slow cookers are excellent for this). Eat foods that store well such as root vegetables. To counteract the congestion that can be caused by heavier winter foods, some salty-flavored foods such as pickled vegetables can be beneficial.

**Foods to emphasize:** grilled or slow-cooked meats, stews, soups, beef, lamb, chicken, bone stock, pork or chicken stock, barley, millet, rice, green onion, ginger,

winter squashes, pumpkin, onions, dried shiitake, fresh garlic, white pepper, chestnuts, pine nuts, leeks, shrimp, root vegetables (turnips, rutabega, burdock root, carrots, parsnips, potatoes, yams), cabbage, kale, daikon radish, small amounts of dairy food, dandelion greens, beans of all kinds, and pickled vegetables.

**Avoid:** raw foods, ice, ice cream, sweets, lettuce, chili peppers, tomatoes, spinach, alcohol, deep fried foods, and coffee.

## **White bean squash soup**

- 1 kabocha squash
- 1 cup dried white navy beans, soaked overnight, boiled until cooked
- 1 leek, cut lengthwise, chopped
- 2" piece kombu
- 2 stems celery, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped, small pieces
- sea salt

Bring a pot of water to boil, add kombu. Peel and cut squash into large pieces, add to boiling water; simmer for approximately 15 minutes, until squash is soft. Take squash out of water, reserve water. Blend squash until smooth with some of the water in a blender. Sauté leek, carrot and celery in olive oil for 5 minutes. Put all ingredients together, adding enough reserved liquid to make a thick soup. Season with salt to taste.

## **Pork Root Vegetable Stew**

- 1 lb. pork shoulder
- 1 tbsp. sesame oil
- diced shallot or ½ onion
- chicken broth or water
- ½ c. mixture, equal amounts of each: shaoxing wine or sherry; black or balsamic vinegar; soy sauce
- 2 tbsp. honey or rice syrup
- 5 shiitake mushrooms
- Vegetables: choose among daikon, carrots, turnips, cabbage (sliced thickly)
- pinch of white pepper (optional)

Brown the meat fully on each side with a little sesame oil for about 5 minutes. Add shallot or onion for a few minutes. Cover with mixture of wine, vinegar and soy sauce, sweetener, pepper and shiitake and enough stock or water to cover completely. Simmer until meat starts to fall apart (break up meat with spoon). This will take several hours. You may have to periodically add stock or water if it becomes too dry. Add vegetables for the last hour of cooking. Cook for 2 - 4 hours. This can be done on the stove or in a slow cooker.

*Many thanks to Liu Ming's "Nourishing Within" classes ([www.dayuancircle.com](http://www.dayuancircle.com)) from which this information was derived.*