

Chinese Food Therapy

Introduction

Chinese food therapy forms an integral part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. People with different constitutions and health problems require unique dietary requirements. The structure and content of their diet can often be manipulated to correct pathological imbalances. In Chinese Food Therapy foods are valued for the impact they have on the various internal organs, the extent and type of impact will vary according to the different seasons.

In western diets we value foods according to the protein, vitamin, calorie, carbohydrate and other nutrient components. Whereas in Chinese diets, foods are valued for their flavours, energies and movements as these affect the internal organs in different ways and therefore affect how we feel.

To maintain a balanced diet, you must eat foods according to the effects that their flavours, temperature and movement will have on your body. However the foods we like are determined by our taste – this is judged by taste buds which are part of the digestive system. It is logical that the foods we like the most are those that compliment or enhance the digestive function. According to Chinese Food Theory, sweet foods benefit the digestive system, pungent foods benefit the lungs and large intestine, salty foods the kidneys and bladder, bitter foods the heart and small intestine and sour foods the liver and gall bladder. The foods we most enjoy are sweet foods, followed by salty foods, therefore to have a balanced diet we need to eat more pungent, sour and bitter foods – the relevance of eating these other flavours becomes apparent when we see the benefits of eating according to the seasons. Eating according to the seasons is highly recommended as it brings you into harmony with the natural ebb and flow of nature. Each season has a flavour and energy associated with it, by eating foods with a similar dynamic you are taking advantage of the natural ebb and flow of yin and yang, this can only be beneficial to your health and will ultimately increase your energy levels. For example; it is considered important to eat more hot, pungent and sweet foods in the summer to balance the environmental temperature and energy common to the summer (expansive and outward in nature) and the internal environment of your body. To harmonise the impact of the winter cold on our bodies it is considered wise to eat foods of a cool nature that are also salty and bitter in flavour.

Foods with an upward movement are good to eat in spring; these are warm in nature with either a bitter, pungent or sweet flavour and enable our bodies to stay in harmony with the season of growth. Whereas in autumn foods that move downwards (cool and sour foods) are advised.

Energetic & flavour values of common food and their seasons:

Spring: Beef, apricots, beetroots, Chinese cabbage, carrot, celery, cherry, chicken eggs, chicken, duck, kidney bean, adzuki bean, sunflower seeds, sweet rice, sweet potato, white sugar peanuts, cows milk – cheese, butter, cream, yogurt, plum, pork, potato, corn, spinach, honey, olive, oyster, fresh ginger

Summer: Black pepper, red pepper, cinnamon, dried ginger, soybean oil,

Autumn: Apple, banana, barley, tofu, mushroom (button), cucumber, egg plant, grapefruit, lettuce, mango, mung bean, spinach, strawberry, wheat

Winter: Clam (salt water) kelp, seaweeds (carrageen, dulse etc...) salt, salted fish, caraway seeds, mutton, pork

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