

A Winter's Tale of TCM health

For all things there's a season and winter is the time of year to store energy, stay warm and eat nourishing foods. Zhang Qian gets a TCM prescription.



Lotus root and tomato soup

Ingredients: Tomato (500g), lotus root (200g), whipping cream

Preparation:

1. Wash ingredients. Boil tomato, put in a blender.
2. Cook mashed tomato in saucepan with water and a little butter.
3. Boil again and add some whipping cream.
4. Add lotus root slices; boil again.
5. Turn down heat, simmer 15 minutes.
6. Add salt to season.

Benefits: Dietary reinforcement for weak people. Though uncooked lotus root is "cold" (*yin* energy) dispels pathogenic heat, cooked lotus is a "warm" (*yang* energy) food that benefits stomach and spleen and nourishes *yin* energy and blood.

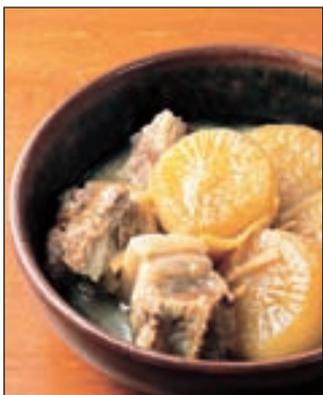
Turnip and pork soup

Ingredients: turnip (200g), *tian ma* (gastrodia) (10g), lean pork (200g), ginger and green onion to taste.

Preparation:

1. Boil pork with water and ginger slices. Remove pork, change water.
2. Add turnip, green onion and ginger. Bring quickly to boil.
3. Turn down heat, simmer 40 minutes.
5. Season with salt.

Benefits: Helps regulate energy flow and adjust functioning of digestive system.



With winter approaching, it is time to prepare the system for a new season, one of conserving and "storing" energy.

Traditional Chinese medicine recommends dietary and medicinal "reinforcement" (such as herbs and acupuncture), and doctors urge everyone to be careful about catching cold and respiratory infections in winter. Stay warm and especially keep the lower back and neck covered.

Living in tune with the seasons is a central principle of TCM, which believes in the correspondence between human beings and the universe. Creatures and plants grow in the spring, flourish and grow strong in summer, fade and are harvest in autumn and stored in winter.

The same natural law applies to health maintenance.

Reinforcement is recommended, says Dr Wang Wenjian with the Shanghai Chinese Clinical and Medicine House, vice chairman of the Chinese Association of Integrative Medicine.

Shanghai Chinese Clinical and Medicine House is a TCM clinic supported by the Shanghai Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine. About 80 TCM doctors offer consultation here, 40 of whom are state-certified veteran TCM doctors.

Wang says reinforcement can be dietary, for healthy people without an energy imbalance; and medicinal (herbal) for those with chronic ailments, energy imbalance or deficiency. Those who are "sub-healthy" should see a doctor about prescription herbal soup or *gao fang* (herbal paste).

"*Huang Di Nei Jing*" ("Medical Classic of the Yellow Emperor"), a fundamental TCM text, suggests reinforcing *yang* or hot energy in spring and summer while nourishing *yin* of cold energy in autumn and spring — to be consistent with energy shifts in the universe.

Reinforcing the kidneys (the reproductive and urinary system) is a major task for winter storage. Kidney, as the "root of innate endowment," is where "original essence" is stored. Kidney meridians become active with the seasonal change, thus storing essence more efficiently for the next year.

Kidney-reinforcing foods such as nuts, wolfberries (*gouqi*), sesame, mutton and longan are recommended for ordinary healthy people in this season. Staying warm to reduce loss of energy also aids efficient reinforcement.

Nourishing *yin* energy, which is usually associated with adding body fluid, is compared with watering flowers. Most water evaporates if watering takes place in midday (spring and summer), but it will keep nourishing the plant overnight if watering is done in the evening.



Traditional Chinese medicine recommends dietary and medicinal "reinforcement," such as herbs like these.

Recommended *yin*-nourishing foods for the season include turnips, yams, fungus, white fungus and lotus root.

Ginseng, aweto (cordyceps) and glossy ganoderma are considered top reinforcing herbs and tonics, but eating them regardless of one's own energy condition may aggravate rather than relieve some problems.

"Prescription according to individual constitution is crucially important for medical reinforcement, especially for the herbs with strong characteristics such as "hot" longan and "cold" chrysanthemum, says Dr Wang.

TCM reinforcement in winter can help relieve symptoms of metabolic syndrome, says Dr Wang, citing high blood sugar, high blood sugar, high cholesterol and high blood fat. These conditions, especially combined with overweight, put people at risk for heart disease and diabetes.

Qi (energy) helps transform (metabolize) nutrition into energy for daily activities. Insufficient and inactive *qi* usually leads to inefficient metabolism and accumulation of fat in the blood, liver and other parts of the body.

Reinforcing *qi* and dispersing accumulated fat is the TCM approach. Herbs such as *huang qi* (milk vetch) can help reinforce *qi* while *pu huang* (cattail pollen) and *ze xie* (rhizoma alismatis) help

break up and dissolve fat.

Regular exercise is also important since it steps up the metabolism and boosts immunity.

Low temperatures in winter can put people at risk for respiratory problems, such as flu, and cardiovascular issues.

As blood vessels tend to contract at low temperature, blood pressure may increase during the cold season, though it may have been stable for months previously. Patients with cardiovascular disease also run a higher risk of stroke in winter.

Some hypertension patients on medication are urged to see their doctor about possibly increasing the dose.

Fatigue, stress and mood swings can also weaken the body and lower immunity.

A diet low in saturated fat, sugar and salt is recommended year round. High-quality protein from vegetables (legumes, pulses) nuts, seeds, meat, fish and dairy is also important.

Patients with chronic respiratory problems should be alert for relapse as immunity usually declines in cold weather. Though air-conditioners are necessary, air should circulate and rooms should be aired.

Those who work in air-conditioned offices should take a walk at noon or do some simple exercise, says Dr Wang.

Winter in TCM — A *yin* Season

Winter is the *yin* (passive) season in nature; it is inactive, cold and damp. So traditional Chinese medicine recommends remaining introspective and restful, consolidating the *qi* (energy) through the season and preparing for the outburst of new life and energy in the spring.

The ancient Chinese believed that human beings should live in harmony with the natural cycles of their environment. The cold and darkness of winter urges us to slow down. This is the time of year to reflect on our health, replenish our energy and conserve our strength.

Out of the five elements, winter is ruled by the water, which is associated with the kidneys. According to the TCM philosophy, the kidneys are considered the source of all *qi* (energy) within the body. They store all of the reserve *qi* so that it can be used in times of stress and change or to heal, prevent illness and age gracefully.

During the winter months it is important to nurture and nourish the kidney *qi*. It is the time where this energy can be most easily depleted. The human body is instinctively expressing the fundamental principles of winter — rest, reflection, conservation and storage.

Recommended food

Winter is a time when many people tend to reduce their activity. The appetite changes from light and cooling food to rich and warm or even hot food to keep the flow of *qi* active.

TCM avoids raw foods during the winter as much as possible, as these tend to cool the body. These food items help the body to stay warm:

- Soups and stews
- Root vegetables
- Beans, lentils
- Garlic, ginger and cinnamon
- Hot water and tea
- Lamb and beef

Eating warm hearty soups, whole grains and roasted nuts helps warm the body's core and to keep the body nourished. Going to bed early, resting well, staying warm and expending less energy than in summer helps the body to overcome the winter cold.

According to TCM, stress, frustration and unresolved anger can work together to weaken the immune system and to allow external factors to affect the body.

TCM offers a variety of prevention and treatment methods, as massage, acupuncture, regular herbal formulas and of course *gaofang*, the nourishing syrup produced from 40 herbs custom-made for each patient.

(Doris Rathgeber, founder of Body & Soul Medical Clinics)