

Eat your way through a cold-free winter

Zhang Qian

When *Xiao Xue* (Light Snow) starts, the weather should get colder with no reversion, according to the traditional Chinese calendar.

To protect yourself against the cold weather, doctors recommend foods with relatively high calories for most people so as to preserve your *yang* (hot) energy.

Xiao Xue, one of the 24 solar terms in the traditional Chinese calendar, indicates the start of snow falling in the country. The temperature will continue dropping and turns the rainfall into snow.

But as the ground is not yet cold enough, there are only a few light snow showers in north China and little will accumulate on the ground. And there will be even less snowfall in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River region including Shanghai.

As the second solar term for winter, Light Snow usually lasts from November 22 or 23 to December 7 or 8. It began last Monday this year and will end next Tuesday.

Entering Light Snow, Chinese farmers will prepare cold-proofing measures for the plants and start making preserved ham.

Traditional Chinese medicine doctors suggest that humans should also prepare cold-proofing measures for themselves.

Yin (cold) energy surpasses *yang* energy in the universe, which leads to an unfriendly environment for the human body, according to Dr Pan Huaxin, a veteran TCM doctor specializing in internal medicine at the Shanghai Chinese Clinical and Medicine House.

"When the human body is attacked by a cold current, energy crisis may occur inside the human body," says Dr Pan.

Secretion of thyroxine and adrenalin increases with the cold weather, so as to accelerate the decomposition of protein, fat and carbohydrate to help protect the body from the cold environment. However, much energy (especially *yang* energy) is inevitably consumed in the process, leaving less to be stored in the body.

Keeping oneself warm by wearing heavy clothes can help reduce the consumption, and wearing a hat is also recommended, as TCM believes that the head is where all the *yang* meridians gather.

Increasing nutrition including calorie intake appropriately is also necessary in the season so as to help the body fight against the



Foods with rich folic acid are recommended this season, including graham bread and soybeans.

cold environment, according to Dr Pan.

Fat and glucose should not be skipped completely. Lean pork, egg, fish, dairy products, beans and other foods with rich carbohydrate and fat content are all recommended as the source of the required energy in winter.

The proteins in these foods are easy to absorb, and it also contains necessary amino acid that helps improve immunity. Yet Dr Pan warns against eating too much,

in case of problems like high cholesterol.

Goose meat is especially recommended during the season. It contains much higher protein than that of duck, chicken, beef and pork, with low fat but high unsaturated fatty acid.

It is also believed to be a reinforcing food in TCM that can help reinforce energy, warm the stomach and benefit the five organs especially lungs, as recorded in "*Ben Cao Gang*

Mu" ("Compendium of Materia Medica") written by famous herbalist Li Shizhen during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

A traditional saying goes that "if you drink goose soup and eat goose meat, you can avoid coughing all year around."

Stewed goose with turnip can greatly benefit lung energy and help relieve coughing, dissolve phlegm and relieve asthma. Eating goose meat or drinking goose soup often can help control diabetes development while supplying nutrition for the patients, according to Dr Pan.

Though goose can be recommended to most people as a winter reinforcement, especially for those with respiratory problems, it should be avoided for those with ulcers and skin itchiness as it is a *fa wu* (stimulating food). Those with high blood pressure and hardening of blood vessels should also avoid eating too much.

The cold weather and shortened day time may also lead to low mood. Apart from attempting to adjust yourself by doing outdoor activities in the sunshine, some anti-blue foods may also help. Foods with rich folic acid are usually recommended. That includes banana, graham bread, spinach, kiwi, oranges and soybeans.

Combat cataracts and it all becomes clear

A cataract is a cloudy or opaque area in the normally clear lens of the eye. Depending upon its size and location, it can interfere with normal vision. Most cataracts develop in people over the age of 55 and usually develop in both eyes, but one may be more affected than the other.

Vision impairment

Normally, the lens focuses light on the retina, which sends the image through the optic nerve to the brain. However, if a cataract clouds the lens, light is scattered so the lens can no longer focus it properly, causing vision problems.

Cataracts generally form very slowly. Signs and symptoms of a cataract may include:

- Blurred or hazy vision
- Reduced intensity of colors
- Increased sensitivity to glare from lights, particularly when driving at night
- Increased difficulty seeing at night
- Change in the eye's refractive error

Causes of cataracts

Most cataracts are due to age-related changes in the lens. However, other factors can contribute to their development including:

- Diabetes mellitus — diabetics are at higher risk for cataracts
- Certain medications including corticosteroids, chlorpromazine and other phenothiazine-related medications
- High exposure to ultraviolet radiation
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Nutritional deficiency — studies have suggested an association between cataract formation and low levels of antioxidants (eg, vitamin C, vitamin E, carotenoids)



- A cataract may also develop following an injury to the eye or surgery for another eye problem, such as glaucoma.

Cataract treatment

The treatment of cataracts is based on the level of visual impairment they cause. If a cataract affects vision only minimally, or not at all, no treatment may be needed. Patients may be advised to monitor for increased visual symptoms and follow a regular check-up schedule. In some cases, a change in eyeglass prescription may provide temporary improvement in visual acuity.

New Vision Eye Clinic is a leader in state-of-the-art cataract surgery, providing extremely high quality eye care. Since 1996, New Vision Eye Clinic surgeons have performed thousands of successful cataract surgeries.



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Discover ginger's generous benefits

GINGER (*sheng jiang*), the underground stem, or rhizome, of the plant *Zingiber officinale* has been used as a medicine in Asian, Indian and Arabic herbal traditions since ancient times.

In China, for example, ginger has been used to aid digestion and treat stomach upset, diarrhea and nausea for more than 2,000 years. It has also been used to help treat arthritis, colic and heart conditions and is believed to help treat the common cold, flu-like symptoms, headaches and even painful menstrual periods.

Ginger cannot be taken for any heat-cold symptoms such as fever, throat pain or yellow and green phlegm, because it supports the heat.

Ginger belongs to the hot food group. It warms the spleen and stomach, dispels cold and prevents *yang* (hot) from collapsing. It also warms the lungs and resolves phlegm dampness.

In addition to these medicinal uses, ginger continues to be valued around the world as an important cooking spice. Native to Asia where its use as a culinary spice spans at least 4,400 years, ginger grows in fertile, moist, tropical soil.

Ginger is used in so many different ways for baking and cooking, for example, ginger bread and ginger cookies. And it's not only in Asia you will find ginger used in daily recipes; it's used for soups, salads and dressings, stir-fried vegetables, meat and fish dishes all around the world.

Very curious gourmets can even find ginger ice cream nowadays. Ginger tea with honey is common in winter, while in summer you can refresh it and neutralize the ginger's heat by adding lime or peppermint.

You can even soak your feet in fresh ginger or ginger powder itself, or with a mix



of herbs and various ingredients. For soaking your feet in the winter time, a mixture of ginger and *bai jiu* (white alcoholic spirit) is recommended.

Cook ginger slices (50g) for some minutes and add 50ml of *bai jiu* (or any white spirit which contains more than 38 percent alcohol). Put the mixture into a basin of warm water and soak your feet — making sure the water covers your ankles — for at least 15 minutes.

Afterward dry your feet and rest. It helps to unblock energy channels (*qi*), dispels pathogenic cold energy (*yin qi*) and reinforces the hot energy (*yang qi*).

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

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