

WARMING FOODS FOR WINTER THE TCM WAY

BY JENNY FANG

Growing up in Sydney, soaking up the sunlight and getting my daily dose of vitamin D at Bondi Beach was nothing out of the ordinary for me. Even in the coolest months, the daytime temperatures rarely fell below 7°C (45°F), which was still a perfect time of year for getting out and enjoying Sydney's many attractions. The best part was still being able to enjoy my favorite sweet treat, 'fro-yo' (frozen yogurt), or anything straight out of the refrigerator during Sydney's winter season. But this kind of lifestyle all changed last year, when I decided to move to China to reconnect with my Chinese roots. Staying warm through Shanghai's bone-chilling winter was a constant battle for me. My grandma and aunt would give me a lecture every time I reached for an icy cold drink or a piece of fruit from the refrigerator. It would almost always go along the lines of, "You shouldn't be eating cold foods, it's bad for your body... (and so on)."

After suffering from endless coughs and colds last winter, and receiving countless lectures from my relatives about not looking after my body, I have decided I want to stay healthy the traditional Chinese way this fall and winter. According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the Yin energy is prevalent in fall and winter, and the Yang (summer) energy moves inward. In TCM, different foods release different energies ranging from cool to hot. There

are five different food categories in total: cool, fresh, neutral, warm and hot. During the cold months, our bodies need food with warming properties to generate body heat and keep our qi (essential energy) flowing. Dr. Doris Rathgeber, TCM practitioner and founder of Body & Soul Medical Clinics, recommends eating fresh, warm foods that are replenishing and sticking to things that nature produces at this time of year.

So, basically, eating seasonally is the key. Rathgeber suggests filling our shopping trolley with red and green fruit, and vegetables, as these contain plenty of antioxidants. Other energetically warming foods include anchovies, bay leaves, chicken, fennel, leek, mussels, mutton, nutmeg, roasted nuts, fresh herbs, and root vegetables. Pears are particularly replenishing foods at this time of year as well, so including plenty of these in our diet at this time of year is a good way to stay healthy.

Preparation of food can also add to its warming nature - like stewing and slow cooking meats, or steaming and flash-frying vegetables without destroying nutrients. But never pan-fry any foods, warns Rathgeber.

Not only do we need to eat warming foods to replenish our bodies, but we also need to eat foods that strengthen



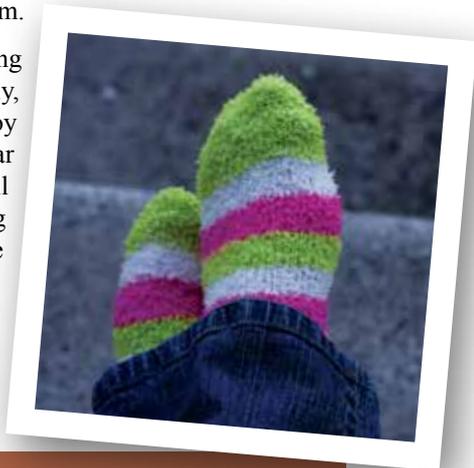


and nourish our kidneys. According to the philosophy of traditional Chinese medicine, the kidneys are considered the source of all qi within the body. Foods that benefit the kidneys during the cold months include whole grains, chestnuts, sweet potatoes, kidney beans, squid, millet, sesame seeds and lamb. And for your toddler kids, focus on seasonal vegetables or rice congee rather than grains or meat, which are harder to digest. Try a pumpkin or sweet potato soup made with chicken or vegetable stock to aid digestion.

Coughing and sneezing noises have been creating quite a 'symphony orchestra' on the Metro, in the streets and our offices in Shanghai. This happens because, "coughs and colds are caused by everything getting drier, especially compared with the humid Shanghai summers," explains Rathgeber. As things dry out, we are more susceptible to coughs and colds. The immune system is weakened because the body is working harder to protect against the cold. According to TCM philosophy, warm pungent herbs should be consumed in winter such as rosemary, shallots, garlic, onions, cinnamon cloves, black pepper, ginger, fennel, anise, dill and horseradish to help prevent colds.

It is reassuring to learn that we can winter-proof ourselves through warming foods with TCM, but Rathgeber advised that we also must remember to "avoid eating 'cold' foods such as cucumbers, melons, salads and literally anything out of the refrigerator!" Cold foods that can be seasoned should be used in dishes with warm herbs, such as coriander, ginger, garlic, and pepper. As well as choosing our foods carefully, Rathgeber recommends that we boost our immune systems and stay healthy this winter by going outside to boost oxygen levels with some fresh air! But don't wear too many layers of warm clothes - this allows the body to acclimatize to the changing weather; and always keep your feet warm.

Eat seasonal and warming foods, dress appropriately, stay active and enjoy Shanghai's winter this year the TCM way. I know I will think twice before reaching for an icy treat from the refrigerator this season! 🍴



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