



Winter Tips... the TCM Way

BY DORIS RATHGEBER

Winter is the Yin season in nature – it is inactive, cold and damp – and in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), people are encouraged to be introspective and restful. A person's Qi (energy) is consolidated through the winter season, preparing it 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. According to these beliefs, 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 of TCM, winter is ruled by the water element which is associated with the kidneys. According to TCM philosophy, the kidneys are considered the source of all energy (Qi) within the body, storing all of the reserve Qi. These reserves can be used in times of stress or change, or to heal or prevent illness and to age gracefully.

During the winter months it is important to nurture and nourish the kidney Qi since 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 FOR WINTER

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. It is important to

choose the right food items to warm the body and keep the flow of Qi active. In TCM, it is recommended for people to avoid raw food during the winter as much as possible, as it tends to cool the body. The following food items help the body stay warm:

- Soups and Stews
- Root Vegetables
- Beans and Lentils
- Garlic
- Ginger and Cinnamon
- Hot Water and Tea
- Lamb and Beef

Eating warm hearty soups, whole grains and roasted nuts helps to warm the body's core and keep it nourished. Going to bed early, resting well, keeping warm and expending less energy than in the summertime helps the body to stay healthy during the winter.

According to TCM, stress, frustration and unresolved anger can also weaken the immune system, allowing external factors to affect the body. TCM offers a variety of treatment methods such as massage, acupuncture, using herbal formulas and of course, taking gao fang. (Gao fang is a nourishing, good tasting syrup that is custom-made for each patient and mixed from 40 herbs.) ✍

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