

# The Energetics of Foods for Health and Healing

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In the Nei Jing Classic of Internal Medicine, compiled over 2000 years ago, may be the first known Chinese writings of the dynamic relationship between health and the energies of foods, or Chinese dietary therapy. The traditional medicines of the human world are intricately connected with and are fundamentally part of nature. The care with which we nourish our own health is reflected in that which we give to our environment, to others, our earth and planet -- an expanding spiral.

As we explore the relationships between food and health, let's acknowledge the nourishment that we have already manifested and presently experience in our lives. Let's remember, too, that the appreciation and joy with which we eat and nourish post-natal Qi are major factors in determining the quality of digestion and transformation of our food into Blood, empowerment and Qi.

We are studying traditional theories, brought to light and expanded upon from personal and clinical experiences and intuitive practice. There will be special exploration of medicinal plant and food remedies for tonifying Heart, Lung and Spleen Qi and more.

We are looking at the dynamic relationship between food energetics and Classical Chinese Medicine thought, that Jing-Essence, Qi-Energy and Shen-Spirit are integrated and operate together dynamically as a whole.

Through our personal and working experiences we see that we are rarely dealing with pure textbook patterns of imbalance that fit into one neat package. Therefore our filters need to be grounded, yet broad enough in scope to be applied effectively for ourselves and others.

## **Individual Needs**

When selecting and preparing our foods there are individual needs to be considered: Our base constitution; our present physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health/issues; the current season and the upcoming season; the Qi energy we need for our daily work and activities; our present dietary practice; our social environment; personal desires; what we wish to accomplish from changing or transitioning our eating habits and lifestyle. Important too is being

practical with making changes that we can actually apply realistically in our day-to-day lives.

### **Location and Season**

Chinese-Asian and Macrobiotic dietary philosophies suggest that we embrace, as much as is possible, native foods that are organic and locally grown and those in season or those foods that are produced in areas with climates similar to our own. When we over consume food imported from very different climates or regions, we may begin to lose adaptability to the immediate surroundings. This is especially true in cases where tropical or semitropical foods are over consumed in temperate or cold climates.

The appearance, development and changes in the pattern of many illnesses may show up seasonally, such as Wind invasions in spring, sun and heat stroke in summer, Damp- and Phlegm-related symptoms in late summer, Dryness-related symptoms in autumn and Cold syndromes in winter.

As the seasons change and transform, the balance of Yin and Yang will be strengthened by the following fundamental principles. In spring and summer, nourish Yang along with cool Yin. In autumn and winter, nourish Yin along with Yang warmth and protection.

This all depends on the season and foods eaten. For example Yang Qi tends to flow outwards to the body's surface in spring and summer while internal Yang Qi may become depleted, thus requiring replenishment in the warm weather.

In the colder and dryer climates of fall and winter it is important to keep warmer and prevent Dryness as we strengthen the interior-Yin. We can use the powers of food-energetics for nourishing Yang and warmth, building Yin, nourishing Dryness, dispelling mucus and Phlegm, and building Qi, Blood and Body Fluids for the present and coming seasons.

Also, health imbalances can result from the over-consumption of heavy animal food by those in a warmer or temperate climate, since this quality of food is more suited to the colder regions.

In colder seasons we would apply longer cooking times and more salt; in warmer weather, we would use lighter cooking methods and less salt. We would cook food lightly and serve it warm to make digestion easier. Steaming, poaching and blanching-boiling help alter the nature of the food for more Yin-cooling; deep frying, stir frying and roasting help alter the nature of the food for more Yang-heating and body insulation.

Until modern times, unrefined, naturally produced whole cereal grains; locally grown seasonal vegetables and some animal foods comprised humanity's primary diet throughout the world.

We should try to base our diet on such foods as grains, beans, sea and land vegetables and other staples which are naturally available and storable.

### **Taste and Variety**

Mastering food selection in today's fast-paced world is a challenge. We need therefore to keep balance in mind. This is achieved by eating in moderation and being aware of taste and variety. Taste is very important because the primary taste sends nutrition via the acupuncture-acupressure meridians to the corresponding organ.

If we eat a balanced meal with many tastes, we can feel satisfied and use this energy for health, productivity and enjoying our lives.

Here is a look at tastes and some nourishing foods and cooking styles:

**Sweet** nourishes Spleen and Stomach—grains, millet, squashes, onions, sweet fruits, bananas, blueberries, oranges, figs, dates, honey, molasses, barley malt, etc. Preparation: steaming, nishimi [A macrobiotic style of cooking done over a low heat for a long time. Veggies are usually cut large.], boiling.

**Sour** nourishes Liver and Gallbladder—tomatoes, barley, vinegar, chicken, turkey, green apples, lemons, grapefruit, etc. Preparation: pickling, steaming, pressing.

**Pungent** nourishes Lung and Large Intestines—onions, garlic, ginger, daikon, peppers, cayenne etc. Cooking methods include kinpira [A type of macrobiotic preparation, where you sauté first and then add water to boil – similar to braising.], pressure cooking.

**Bitter** nourishes Heart and Small Intestine—kale, lettuce, dandelion, broccoli, arugula, endive, collard greens, etc. Preparation: raw, pressed, stir fry, blanch.

**Salty** nourishes the Kidneys and Bladder—tofu, fish, miso, eggs, burdock root, sea vegetables (wakame, arame, hiziki, kombu, kelp) etc. Preparation: stewing, frying, nabe [ceramic pot cooking, prepared at the table].

## **Color and Signature**

The Color of a food plays a role in food energies, as does the doctrine of signatures, which will be discussed at my seminar. For example-a bitter green like kale will nourish the Heart because of its bitter taste; will nourish the Liver because of its green color, and the Kidney, especially the bones, because of its rich minerals.

Red foods like apples and red peppers nourish the Heart and Small Intestine. The apple also nourishes the Spleen because of its sweet taste and the Kidneys when it is baked and lightly salted.

White foods like white onions, tofu and radishes nourish the Lungs and Large Intestine, while the radish nourishes the Liver because of its sharp taste. It can assist in moving stagnant Qi of the liver.

As we continue our journey of study, exploration and application of food healing may we go forward with health, vitality and wonderful eating. I look forward to continuing writing, teaching and sharing with your audiences.

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