



Introduction to Traditional Chinese Food Energetics

Do you find yourself exhausted with calorie counting or worrying about the fat content of your lunch? Well you don't have to, and I would like to share with you what I have discovered since studying Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). I have found a new way of thinking and eating, a way where the most important rule is to enjoy your food.

In TCM there is no Carbohydrate, Protein or Fat category. Instead the nutritional value of a food has a set of energetic properties. These energetic properties describe the action a food has on the body. Food is described as having certain qualities such as temperature or thermal nature, different flavour or taste, a route or organ that it is affiliated with, and an action or direction of the movement the food will have in the body. This information is gathered by observing the body after the food has been eaten.

Temperature

We already have some knowledge about food energetics. We know that in winter we prefer a roast with lamb and root veggies (warming). We know that on a hot summer barbeque we reach for salads with lettuce, tomato and cucumber (cooling). And some of us also know that a glass of red wine can warm our stomach and add a healthy flush to our cheeks. This effect is known as the temperature of the food.

According to TCM a food may be hot, warm, neutral, cool or cold. The temperature of a food is a measure of its effect on the body after digestion and is used to help us balance the overall effect of a meal to suit

our body's needs. The temperature of food will also be influenced by the cooking or preparation method.

Flavours

There are five different flavours of food, sweet, pungent, salty, sour and bitter.

Sweet foods are used for moistening and nourishing, pungent foods for dispersing stagnation and promoting flow, salty foods for softening and detoxifying, sour foods for stimulating absorption and contraction, and bitter foods for draining moisture and counteracting dampness.

Ying and Yang

We have all heard about Yin and Yang, but what it is?

Ying and Yang are labels used to describe how things function in relation to each other and the universe. In the human body, yang is used to action our sympathetic nervous system, it helps us to respond to stimuli and to get us moving and generate warmth, sensation and movement. Yin is seen as the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system and the adrenal cortex. Yin tends to sedate, soothe and calm. We all have aspects of both yin and yang and often more of one than the other. An enhanced balance of yin and yang can be achieved through food.

Qi and Blood

Qi (pronounced ch-ee) is a state of being; it is the breath of life and energy. In nutritional terms dietary Qi is absorbed by the use of vibrantly alive food. Blood is a measure of the quality of nourishment available to the body and not the red fluid that is more commonly known. This high value blood is dependent on the quality of food we eat and the ability of our body to absorb nourishment. When blood is strong we feel great in our skin and full of energy.

Eat-well, Live-well

Now that we have some general TCM principles, let's look more specifically at how to assist the body in digestion. The digestion is the

most important step in nutrition. If we digest food perfectly, we function more efficiently physically, mentally and emotionally.

Six really important considerations we know, but sometimes need reminding.

- 1) **ENJOY.** If we have a happy relationship with the food we are eating and experience joy when we eat, our bodies will be more effective in the digestion process. It is often our relationship with food that is more important than what we actually eating. If you change nothing but this, I have got my most important message across to you.
- 2) **RELAXATION.** Our digestion works better when we have time to focus on what we are eating and have correct posture to allow an open pathway for the food to travel to our digestion organs. So sitting cross legged and bent at our desk while still checking work emails is detrimental to good digestion. Try taking a breath before you tuck into your lunch.
- 3) **CHEW.** The more we chew the less work our stomach has to do in breaking down the food. This increases the nutrients that are extracted from the food. Remember the old Chinese proverb, 'The stomach has no teeth'.
- 4) **AVOID STAGNATION.** Sounds simple but may just be one of the most testing. Stop eating when you are full. When we over eat we create a queue of food and stagnation. This stagnation can make us feel tired as all our energy is used on the food waiting to be digested. Another way to avoid stagnation is to eat our main meal early in the night.
- 5) **LOOK AFTER THE SPLEEN.** The spleen does not need much fluid with food. Too much liquid will weaken digestion. Of course you can still drink between meals. The digestive process also needs warmth

(digestive fire). Too much raw or chilled food can weaken the spleen.

- 6) **LIFE FORCE.** A strong life force in food is important for our own essence. Choose organic and locally grown food as much as possible as the life force in that food is strongly conserved. The life force is also affected by processing, preservation and microwaving.

We have just revised the most excellent general eat-well considerations. Put these simple views into everyday life and the results will follow. I look forward to hearing how you are enjoying food and observing the results that come with this pleasure.

Information provided by Holly Pannett - holly.pannett@thethirdspace.com

Contact Holly for further information and advice!