



# Food the Chinese Medicine Way

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.

Daily food choices can make the difference between sickness and health. Much can be learned from the extensive body of Chinese medicine knowledge regarding the therapeutic nature of food. Largely based on the Law of the Five Elements and Yin Yang Theory, food is classified according to its energetic quality such as flavor, taste, color, thermal nature, and vital organ it nourishes. Customized dietary recommendations are made based on this knowledge according to presenting symptoms and constitution; providing super nutrition to help re-claim and maintain maximum health and balance in life.

Cooking, baking and drying food preparation methods transforms a raw food which is classified as Yin (cold and wet) into a food that is more Yang (hot and dry). A fundamental Chinese dietary rule is to consume foods closest to the center of the Yin/Yang continuum – meaning those energetically classified as not too hot, nor too cold. Rice is one such food recommended to bring

balance and promote healing, especially helpful during recovery from illness when prepared along with other foods in the traditional form of congee, for which you can find many recipes online.

Excessive consumption of cold raw foods impedes circulation of Qi (vital energy) which potentially leads to pain and stagnation – exactly why this is a predominant root cause of Bi Syndrome, the Chinese medicine term for arthritis. Conversely, ingestion of more warming foods reduces pain and maximizes healing by opening and boosting Qi circulation throughout the body. Analogous to joint pain reduction in warm, dry environments – versus increased pain during cold, wet conditions. Warming foods also have a positive healing effect on the ability to digest and assimilate food properly.

According to Chinese medicine, the Spleen is responsible for transformation and transportation of food – making it the primary focus for proper digestion. When Spleen Qi is ample and strong it means a greater chance

for a well-nourished body. Consumption of too many Yin (cold) raw foods damages and depletes the Spleen oftentimes leading to a condition called a “Damp Spleen”. Weak Spleen Qi also leads to excessive mucus in the body which is considered a product of improperly digested food. Ginger tea is an excellent warming drink to increase Spleen Qi and eliminate mucus. It also reduces flatulence and abdominal swelling that can arise from eating cold foods. Consumption of predominantly cooked or dried foods such as soups, cooked vegetables, warm drinks, dried fruits, cooked meat, and baked fruits is recommended to avoid and counteract these symptoms.

Eating predominantly warming, cooked foods is important for everyone, especially during the cold weather season. It is essential to realize the damage to digestion and metabolism that can happen with overconsumption of cold, raw foods. It can also undermine and deplete not only Spleen Qi but eventually the Qi of the entire body to a point of exhaustion, weakness and lack of life luster – after all the Spleen is traditionally known as “the source of life”. Combining this warming food approach with acupuncture treatment provides greater chance for eliminating acute and chronic pain through increasing Qi and Blood flow throughout the body no matter where one lives. Eating meals at regular intervals, consuming foods according to Chinese food therapy recommendations, and living a life of balance are essential for creating, maintaining and experiencing a “Qi-full” existence.

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