

Spring Cleaning for the Body, Mind and Spirit

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



Chinese medicine teaches natural ways of living in harmony with environmental cycles. The Law of the Five Elements designates the relationship of each season to various components of life. Recommendations for particular lifestyle, behavior habits and treatments ensure balance and vitality throughout every season.

As the most yin time of the year, winter is characterized by inner reflection and energy conservation. Now that winter is ending, spring is moving in as days become longer and warmer. Spring becomes a forward and expansive transition providing opportunity for new and productive endeavors.

The Five Element theory teaches spring is time of growth and renewal - one directly related to the wood element - for which the liver and gall bladder meridians are associated. Maintaining balance with ample Qi and Blood flow of these organs produces vibrant health and tranquil mind. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal treatments are received for this purpose.

Chinese medicine physiology tells us that healthy liver energetics establishes a smooth, soothing flow of energy throughout body and mind.

However, when liver Qi becomes obstructed, stagnant, or overheated - liver energetics is hampered, resulting in physical and emotional problems.

Anger is the emotion associated with the wood element - wind the environmental factor, green the color, and sour the taste. Spring is a time to rise early and take brisk walks outside. Walking amongst the spring flowers brightens the mind and nourishes spirit. Deep breaths of fresh air combined with appreciation of the moment helps release feelings of anger or resentment.

The environmental factor of wind has a direct effect on liver energy. Penetrating of the body by cold or hot wind easily leads to a spring cold or flu. Take special care to keep the back of the neck covered on the windy days of spring.

Flexibility enhancement is crucial during the spring because tendons and sinews are nourished by wood. Stretching exercises inherent in the practice of Qigong and T'ai Chi protect the tendons and sinews. Breathing exercises integral to these disciplines promote optimal physical and emotional balance, easing irritability and anger.

The liver is said to be the official of strategic planning, creating vision and direction in harmony with nature. The gall bladder creates ability to make decisions and judge wisely. Through this combined wood wisdom, a person sees their life plan and how to bring it to fruition - a precious creative spring of blossoming wood energy.

The liver is perhaps the most congested of all organs. Too much fat, chemicals, intoxicants, and denatured foods disrupt the liver's biochemical processes. Cleansing toxins from the body is necessary just as spring house cleaning - the body, mind and spirit need renewal too.

"Keep it if it helps you grow; if you don't need it let it go."

Eat less to cleanse the body of the fats and heavy foods from winter. Eating should include fresh greens, sprouts, legumes, seeds and grains. The expansive, rising quality of sweet and pungent flavored foods create a personal spring within. Food is best cooked for a shorter period of time but at high temperatures.

A multitude of Chinese medicine health tips exist according to the change of seasons. Following these simple recommendations can bring this to your doorstep - all you need to do is turn the knob and allow it to come in. Enjoy the creation of a new beginning this spring as development and awareness of mind, body and spirit blossoms.

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