

Nourishing the Source of *Life*



by Shoshanna Katzman

According to Chinese medicine, the spleen is the primary yin organ of the body traditionally known as “the source of life.” The spleen governs the breakdown of food and drink and then turns it into energetic nourishment for the body. Numerous factors need to be considered in terms of lifestyle habits to ensure healthy, vibrant spleen energy. This is especially the case due to our fast-paced society which tends to overwork and deplete the spleen, leading to an inordinate number of people suffering from digestive issues and low energy.

Optimal spleen nourishment comes from nutritious and wholesome food and drink in proper quantity and at regular intervals. This ensures an abundant and vital amount of “gu qi” (pronounced goo-chee’), which is a form of vital energy derived from food. Make time for shopping at stores that offer a wide variety of fresh organic food, enjoy the process of food preparation, and eat in a quiet, mindful manner while taking time to chew your food completely. This is important to maximize the quality and quantity of gu qi for proper nourishment of the blood, vital organs, tissues, and cells. Making these life style habits a priority increases the likelihood of a “happy spleen.”

In addition to transformation and transportation of food and drink, the spleen is in charge of transforming dampness within the body, which otherwise obstructs the spleen. A preponderance of warming and dried foods is recommended to reduce the likelihood of excessive cold damp accumulation, as is avoidance of cold damp environments. In fact, the spleen is traditionally likened to the earth at the base of a valley, having

the tendency to become damp. Always feeling cold, abdominal pain, fatigue, pale complexion, loss of appetite, loose stools, cold or weak limbs, and abdominal distension after eating are indicative of a damp spleen.

If a person with this condition continues to eat cold, wet foods it just adds to an already damp condition and makes things worse. Therefore, eating cooked or dried foods and avoiding cold raw foods, cold drinks with ice, and frozen foods is highly recommended to both prevent and alleviate this condition. It is also important because heat is necessary for proper digestion and it is traditionally said that “the spleen hates cold.” Furthermore, the spleen is nourished by yellow colored and sweet foods according to the Law of the Five Elements. These include squash, soybeans, burdock root, barley, leeks, apples, egg yolk, corn, oats, rice, potato, sweet potato, yams, dates, figs, cherries, grapes, tofu, beef, chicken, lamb, licorice root, and molasses. Combining several of these foods into a deliciously warming soup is an excellent choice.

The spleen is in charge of processing

information, similar to how it processes food. It is essential to avoid excessive stimulation coming into the body to protect the energetics of the spleen – a task especially difficult due to our high tech society. Otherwise, the spleen becomes negatively impacted by overthinking and excessive worry – leading to “undigested information” building up in the system, potentially becoming the root cause of excessive dampness and depleted source of life. To protect and nourish spleen energy, it is helpful to put your smart-phone down more often and take time to commune with nature. Meditative and creative activities such as gardening, music, and artwork are good starting points. Find activities to embellish your life with gentle quietude and time for inner reflection. Create healthy boundaries for the amount of time spent on a computer, hand-held device, and even watching television or online videos – especially while eating meals. And maintain healthy boundaries in your relationships, surrounding yourself with warm, kind, and non-toxic people. Also, sing whenever the chance arises as this too nourishes the energetics of the spleen.

As the Chinese classic states, “when the spleen is healthy it can generate all living things. If it becomes depleted, it can bring about the hundred diseases.” Preventative measures go a long way for health preservation. It is essential to nourish the source of life for continued good health and well-being.

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If you don't like the road you're walking,
start paving another one.

~Dolly Parton