

The Yang of Late Summer

Chinese medicine philosophy and practice guides us toward establishing greater awareness and connection to our inner nature and external environment

by Shoshanna Katzman



Chinese medicine philosophy and practice guides us toward establishing greater awareness and connection to our inner nature and external environment. It views the change of seasons as signifying an energetic shift within the natural environment and within each person – one that directly impacts the physical, spiritual, emotional and energetic aspects of being. Learning how to live one's life in harmony with these changes is key for maintaining health and well-being.

Greater communion with nature is gained while practicing the gentle exercises of Qigong and Tai Chi. It may also be ushered into one's consciousness with bodily-felt experiences during an acupuncture treatment. A Chinese medicine practitioner takes special note of seasonal changes to enhance these effects. This begins with an assessment of the ever-changing forces of yin and yang and how they manifest within the body. Upon doing so, one keeps in mind that spring and summer are associated with the growing heat and movement of yang, while autumn and winter are associated with the ensuing cold and stillness of yin.

Information gathered during this assessment is applied to decide upon treatment protocol along with lifestyle and dietary recommendations based on each season and each person. The end goal is to sustain a steady stream of health through maintaining yin-yang balance, free flow of qi and proper vital organ function throughout each changing season. In this way, Chinese medicine provides a holistic approach to health and healing that upholds prevention as a key guiding principle by "digging a well before one is thirsty and forging weapons before the battle has ensued."

The main objective as late summer approaches is to temper heat and its impact on the earth element, which includes the spleen and stomach organ systems. As the "minister of the mill," the stomach breaks down ingested foods and fluids. This function can be impaired by the extreme heat of late summer causing an imbalance known as "excessive stomach fire" resulting in confusion, anxiety, hyperactivity and even manic behavior.

Chinese medicine further teaches us that the spleen – as the source of life – transforms food broken down by the stomach into usable nutrition and qi, which it then transports to other body organs. The extreme heat of late summer has the potential to aggravate the energetics of the spleen. This may lead to an imbalance known as "excess damp heat of the spleen" resulting in symptoms such as indigestion, poor assimilation, bloating and phlegm.

Paying special attention to our digestion and food choices during late summer is thus particularly important due to the spleen and stomach's role in transformation and transportation. Avoiding too many desserts and other sugary foods during this time of year is a way of supporting spleen as it is impaired by excessively sweet foods. Taking time to be quiet and focus on one's food during mealtimes is another good place to begin. It is also essential to chew food completely, eat meals at the same time each day and avoid the tendency to overeat.

Seasonal acupuncture received during the late summer keeps the body's yin-yang energetics in balance. It also serves to boost, balance and tune-up one's inner potential

to manifest health and overall sense of wellbeing. Moreover, treatment is focused on paving the way for an easy transition from one season to the next. For example, the late summer which is designated as the fifth season provides a bridge between the yang transition of spring and summer and the yin transition of fall and winter.

Receiving acupuncture and/or practicing Tai Chi and Qigong during this transitional period moves us smoothly from the expansion, playfulness and activity of spring and summer into the inwardness, storage and stillness of fall and winter. What better way is there to move effortlessly through the changing seasons and ever-changing rhythms of your life?

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