
THE 100° SOUP...

Healthy Food Choices from Chinese Medicine

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When a person is sick, first regulate the patient's diet and lifestyle," said a famous Chinese doctor in the Tang dynasty.

Chinese medical thought includes great wisdom about how we can live in the most healthy, happy way possible. Acupuncturists often ask patients to make some changes in their diet in order to enhance the effectiveness of treatments. Though there are particular dietary remedies for certain energetic conditions, there is also a basic healthy diet which will benefit everyone.

The digestive process

According to Chinese medical theory, the Stomach and Spleen (the Earth element) are the cornerstones of the digestive process. The Stomach, likened to a pot on a fire, receives food and liquids and "rotten and ripens" them. As the food cooks in the Stomach, it is separated into useful parts and waste parts. The Spleen provides the heat for digestion and distributes the pure parts to the rest of the body.

The digestive process consists of first creating a 100° soup in the Stomach (remember that body temperature is 98.6°). The simple rule to remember is that anything that helps the creation of the 100° soup helps digestion, and anything that hinders the creation of the 100° soup hinders digestion. Thus, the following are dietary suggestions from Chinese medicine:

1. Eat mostly cooked food.

The more a food is like 100° soup, the easier it is for the body to digest and absorb its nutrients, which is why soups and stews are so nourishing. Cold and raw foods require much more energy to digest because the Stomach needs to warm and cook them before it can use them—thus, the net energy gain from cold or raw food is less. Everything we eat has to be turned into 100° soup before it can be digested and assimilated.



***Your stomach
is like a pot on
a fire and
creates "soup"
from what you
eat and drink.***

2. Avoid chilled, very cold or frozen foods. Avoid drinking iced beverages with your meals.

Life is warm. Cold food and drink cools the Stomach so that it can't create the 100° soup very well—the heat of digestion is put out. Thus, cold foods are often not digested very well, and they tend to accumulate in a sludge of stagnant food.

During the winter, we should eat primarily warmer foods. During the summer we can eat cooler foods because our metabolism is higher. Still, it is better to eat cold foods and iced beverages between meals when they will not impede the digestion of other foods.



Avoid drinking iced beverages with your meals.

3. Eat a reasonable amount.

Stagnant food develops when food is jam-packed into the Stomach and begins to accumulate. The Stomach goes into a kind of overdrive as it tries to burn off the foods. When the Stomach gets hot, we feel it as hunger. Thus, overeating begets stagnant food which begets Stomach heat which begets hunger, and a pathological loop is created. Over time, this stagnant food and liquid (dampness) tends to congeal and gunk up the entire digestive system.

4. Avoid foods that are excessively dampening.

Different foods generate more or less body fluids. Most foods are somewhat damp, and we need dampness to stay alive. However, some foods are excessively damp and interfere with the Spleen's role in digestion.

Sugar is one example of a very damp food. A little bit of sweet is beneficial to the Spleen. Too much sweet damages the Spleen, which then craves more sweetness. If you eat concentrated sugars, these create more damp and further damage the Spleen, which craves more sugar—and another pathological loop is created. When you eat less sugar, your craving for sugar will decrease.

Dampening foods include:

- sweets
- citrus fruits and juices
- tomatoes, tomato sauce
- sugar, molasses, honey
- wheat
- dairy products
- fats, oils, and nuts

• pork and beef (the fatter and richer a meat is, the more it generates damp in the body)

All of these highly nutritious foods are good for us in small quantities, In excess though, their damp nature accumulates to form fat and adipose tissue.

Certain combinations of these foods are dietary disasters, according to Chinese medical theory. Ice cream or frozen yogurt is very dampening, too sweet and too cold. The ingredients of pizza, tomato sauce, cheese and wheat, are all dampening, and greasy additions such as pepperoni and sausage make it worse.

A basic healthy diet

A basic healthy diet, according to the traditional wisdom of Chinese dietary therapy, includes

1. Mostly vegetables and grains with small amounts of everything else (rice is the preferred grain because it helps to drain off dampness; a variety of other grains, not just wheat, is advised)
2. Mostly cooked and warm food that is not too sweet, not too greasy or oily, not too damp
3. A moderate amount of food chewed well
4. Warm water or beverage with meals
5. A balance of the five tastes (spicy, salty, sour, bitter, sweet) (see article last issue)

This basic healthy diet is very much like the low-fat "heart-healthy" diets that are popular now. But they aren't anything new, are they? They are like the traditional diet of most people living in temperate climates all over the world and are very much like what our great grandparents ate. We are beginning to realize as a society that our modern diet of too much sugar, fats, oils and animal protein is not good for health and is not conducive to longevity.

Choose today to make some healthy changes in your diet. You'll feel better!

Much of the information in this article is taken from The Tao of Healthy Eating by Bob Flaws, Blue Poppy Press.



Eat mostly vegetables and grains, and mostly cooked and warm food.