



TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICIN (TCM) **Nutrition – the 5 elements Cuisine**

Nutrition plays an important role in TCM and belongs to one of the three Qi sources. Our western experience with diets, vitamins and calorie calculations is certainly not on this 2000 to 3000 years old level yet. Central to the Chinese cuisine is considering food as a medicine. Chinese eat ENERGY. TCM does not think in terms of vitamins, minerals and calories as we are used to do in our Western World.

Do you want to look beyond our world of western diets, where we often run up against the limits and do not know how to continue, than you are invited to read this article and attend one of our future Health Related Seminars!

The 5-element cuisine: Western and Chinese understanding

Often we think we eat healthily but we do, without realizing, our body more harm than good. We are trying once again a diet and take vitamin and mineral supplements. We do not get the desired results or the result is of a short term. We slim down a few kilograms and then gain weight again. The well-known jo-jo effect. Or worse: we are even sick and feel disorientated! We have encountered the limits of our Western diets and we no longer know how to proceed.

The Western approach

It is true that in the early 20th century the vitamin and mineral culture has brought many benefits to the western world. We only need to think of the disease beriberi and rickets. Two diseases caused by vitamin and mineral deficiency. We swear on vitamins etc. and our food thinking is drenched in calories, vitamins and minerals. Add to this our Western analytical mind. The result is that we consider the human body as a machine composed of particles. It is assumed that isolated components of a nutrient have an effect on certain body functions. For example having a cold, most of the victims drink a few extra glasses of orange juice and take vitamin C. Given the amounts of orange juice that we consume, a cold should already have been extinguished. Why does this very often it not work?

TCM approach - Some philosophy and basic principles

TCM is rooted in the Chinese philosophy, the Tao, and more than 2000 years old. In Taoism, man is a part of the whole, or the world order. Man and nature are considered as a whole but without excluding diversity. In other words: there is an interaction between elements. Each element can only be understood by its relationship to the whole. No single phenomenon can be separated from one or another. If you compare our western way of thinking with the Chinese way, you come to the conclusion that they think circular and we think linear. (Circular thinking - Interaction between the elements, linear thinking - cause and effect thinking).

It is important to realize that the Traditional Chinese Medicine is not just acupuncture. This is not a right understanding of TCM. Acupuncture represents approximately 20 % of TCM. Other disciplines include herbal therapy, Qi Gong, Tuina and of course nutrition. Here one should realize the importance of certain food rules to be observed otherwise the benefit of, for example, an acupuncture treatment will be gone quickly.

It should also be mentioned that a large part of the postnatal energy is taken in via the food (renewable qi) and belongs to one of the three Qi sources. So if you want to live longer and better you should seriously pay attention to your nutrition otherwise you exhaust your prenatal (genetic) Qi (energy).

Yin , Yang and the five elements nutrition system

Central to the Chinese cuisine is that food is medicine. The starting point is a harmonious balance of the two anti-poles, Yin and Yang and the unimpeded flow of Qi, the life energy. Yin represents cold and Yang heat. Yin and Yang are in balance when the Qi can flow unimpeded. This cold-warm system has further on been refined with hot, warm, neutral, refreshing and cold. Foods are classified according to the five elements system (earth, metal, water, wood and fire).

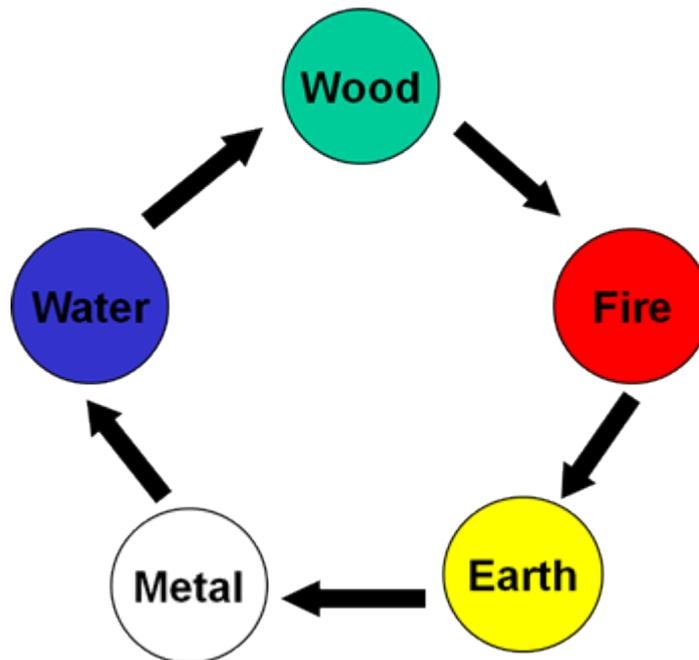
It is important to note that each element represents two organs: a Yin and a Yang organ. For example, the wood element consists of the liver, which is Yin and the gall bladder, which is Yang. The function of the Yin organs is to produce, transform and regulate the storage of Qi. The Yang organs are mainly responsible for the digestion and the supply of nutrients to the body.

The five elements - earth, metal , water, wood and fire

Before discussing how **food** fits into the theory, it is important to understand how the elements work.

Parallel to hot, warm, etc. nutrients and organs are divided into five groups , namely, wood (liver and bile/gall bladder) , fire (heart and small intestine) , earth (spleen and stomach), metal (lung and colon) and water (kidneys and bladder). The wood feeds the fire, the heat of the fire brings earth to life, metal is extracted from the earth, the minerals of the metal make the water alive, the water nourishes wood et cetera. See also below (Mother son cycle –Sheng cycle).

Sheng Cycle (the creating cycle)



Cooking according to the five elements

In general it is advantageous to eat mainly cooked food and a greater proportion of energetically warm food in order not to affect the transformation process. But there are exceptions like for example the stomach yin shortage (Wei Yin Xu) syndrome.

Cooking in tune with the five elements increases the energetic level of a dish. A simple example is carrot soup: Heat oil (earth) in the pan, add the sliced carrots (earth), coriander (metal), salt (water), few drops of lemon (wood) and thyme (fire). Add water or better broth to it, mix and mash it and ready!

In this way you feed every organ in your body!

To make the application easier and practical we have made a list of foods according to the 5 elements. You should be aware that there might be differences compared to lists compiled by different authors.

It should be mentioned that as in the West we consume a lot which is unknown in China, it were mainly Western TCM doctors who had to determine the energetic nature of Western foods and they are still working on it. This explains some minor differences on the lists of foods.

Thermal cooking - Yanginise and Yinginise nutrients

You can yanginise food by grilling, roasting, long cooking in liquid and cook in alcohol. For example a tomato has a cold character and you can yanginise it by cooking it in the oven. By long cooking you store energy QI.

You can yinginise by blanching, braising, salting and cooking with plenty of water.

Application of TCM Dietetics

As nobody is “standard”, there is no standard TCM diet.

The TCM diet should be tailored to the existing energetic imbalance or syndrome. We now come to the point where you need the advice of a TCM doctor. He establishes the patient’s syndrome . On this basis he can give you an idea.

Epilogue

This article is only an invitation to start looking beyond the world of western diets where we often do not know how to continue. It takes some time and patience to adapt to this way of thinking / cooking / eating, but you will find it adds value in terms of health, energy and vitality. After all, you eat vital energy instead of calories, vitamins, and minerals. It is important reading about it and put it into practice in your kitchen! Let the cook be your doctor!

Conferences

Till now, MedChine organized two conferences and intends to organize a few more, more on this subject. So if you are interested to know more about TCM nutrition you are welcome to attend!

Some “golden” rules and home remedies

	Don't take the TCM diet too serious. If you “sin” now and then, no problem, enjoy life! ;
	In the morning you eat like an emperor, at noon like a king, in the evening like a beggar. Note that “Stomach time” is between 07:00 and 09:00 o'clock;
	About liquid: a) Don't drink much before, during and after a meal. Too much liquid can solve the digestive fire; and b) Never drink cold as your metabolism has to warm up the liquid which demands vital energy; c) Drink warm water preferably cooked for at least 15 minutes. This has a positive influence on the organism.
	<u>Ginger, some remedies:</u> Especially in winter time avoid foods with cool and cold thermal nature like citrus fruits and salad. A good example and home remedy is: don't take any citrus fruits when you have a beginning of a cold. You will worsen the situation and cool down your internal system. A proven home remedy is a ginger tea. Simmer thumb-sized pieces of ginger in water for 10 minutes and drink it. The idea is that ginger warms the organism and chases the cold. Take ginger tea after an ice cream. You will balance your yin and yang. Nevertheless, you should take ginger in the morning as this opens the Yang energy. In the morning the body opens up for the Yang energy and

	after 12:00 it moves to Ying energy. So do not take ginger after that time. Only in case of a beginning cold you can take ginger any time.
	Avoid excess of dairy products, especially creamy products, as they are energetically cool and cause dampness and phlegm. You can take some parmesan cheese and hard goat/sheep cheese. To keep up your calcium level it is recommended to take "master soup". This is broth with lots of bones, vegetables and meat cooked for at least 6 hours.
	Avoid excess of sweet and fatty foods, they also cause dampness and phlegm;
	Eat a little bit of everything;
	Choose foods that are appropriate for the season;
	Don't freeze your food. It will be dead;
	Don't use the micro wave;
	Cook with organic food;

Sources and books recommended:

Traditional Chinese Medicine	Sheila McNamara (ISBN 0-465-00629-9)
Chinese Nutrition Therapy (English version)	Jörg Kästner (ISBN 978-3-13-130962-4) (highly recommended!)
Propädeutik der Chinesischen Diätetik (German version)	Jörg Kästner (ISBN 978-3-8304-5282-9) (sehr empfohlen!)
Prince Wen Hui's Cook: Chinese Dietary Therapy (English version)	Dr. Bob Flaws and H. Lee Wolfe (ISBN13: 9780912111056)
Das Yin und Yang der Ernährung (German version)	Dr. Bob Flaws and H. Lee Wolfe (ISBN (ISBN 3-453 093645)
Ernährung nach den fünf Elementen	Barbara Temelie (ISBN 978-3 928554-03 -9)