

Fall 2006 Newsletter
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"Knowing ignorance is strength,
Ignoring knowledge is sickness.
If one is sick of sickness,
then one is not sick.

The wise one is not sick, because he is sick of sickness."

-Tao Te Ching

This started as a micro-newsletter, then turned mini, now is a healthy medium size. The reason is that it is about the spleen and the stomach, which are the two organs that govern digestion, which even in summary, is a huge topic....so I hope you enjoy.

Billy Z.

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1. Five element philosophy

Ok, so last newsletter we talked about how summer corresponded to the fire, and how that corresponded to the heart and small intestines. We are now moving into the next phase of the year, which corresponds to earth.

Before I go on, a quick explanation of the five element philosophy. First, it is fundamental to classical Chinese philosophy that patterns repeat themselves, and that the smallest particle contains that same patterns as the entire universe. By this way of thinking, if we gain a true understanding of any one part of the world, that understanding can reflect out to everything. Along these lines, the concept of the five elements is used to explain some of the patterns that have been observed throughout the ages. Again, remember, these patterns are not limited to season alone, but also help us understand the relationship our organs have to each other.

The elements are water, wood, fire, earth and metal. Each element has a corresponding season, time of day, organ, type of food, etc. Thus the understanding of the five elements, allows us to understand that waking at 3am in the morning is connected to the qi of the liver, and the lung's qi is most active (and most vulnerable) in the fall, and more. (For more info, read Between Heaven and Earth, or The Web that Has No Weaver.)

2. Late summer...Stomach and Spleen

The late part of summer, as we sometimes have called Indian summer here in the west, relates to earth. The earth element is related to qi of the spleen and the stomach, which govern our digestion, and day to day energy level. In a way, the spleen and stomach act as the engine for the entire body, providing fuel for all the systems.

When healthy, the stomach triggers a healthy appetite (for healthy food!), receives food, begins the process of transforming food into qi, and directs this to continue its way down the body. From there the qi of the spleen

takes over and completes the process of transforming the food into qi, and then distributes qi to the other organs, muscles and to the mind. When these two systems are healthy, appetite will be good, the body strong, energy good, allergies and congestion will be at a minimum or none at all, and memory and concentration will be clear. Emotionally, a healthy stomach and spleen manifests as contentment, with the capacity for compassion for others. The spleen is one of three organs that nourish the uterus, and plays a key role in fertility for women, and prenatal development.

The spleen and stomach qi are kept healthy in good, old fashioned kind of ways: healthy diet, exercise and regular sleep. The key to spleen and stomach is rhythm and predictability. For children, the qi of the spleen and stomach is not fully developed, and this offers the explanation for why children do best on a regular schedule, and upsets to their schedule lead to temper tantrums, illness, etc.

The spleen and stomach are both vulnerable to dampness: symptoms can include heaviness and sluggishness, arthritis, mental dullness, loss of appetite, nausea, edema, excess mucus and possible infections of yeast and other microorganisms. Stomach heat can lead to gas, belching, constipation, bad breath and excessive appetite; the qi of the stomach can get stuck, causing gas, bloating, cramping and pain. The qi of the stomach can rebel upwards causing nausea and vomiting.

In addition to being affected by dampness, the qi of the spleen can be weakened by poor nutrition, overwork, irregular sleep or diet. Even eating healthy foods in an unhealthy pattern (i.e. eating on the run) can impact the spleen. A weak spleen means poor digestion, loose stools, fatigue, weakness, poor memory, poor concentration, excessive uterine bleeding (though this can be caused by heat as well), and more. Emotionally, someone with a weak spleen may be pensive, over-giving, or self-sacrificing beyond their ability to keep themselves healthy. Spleen qi collapse can lead to diarrhea or prolapsed organs.

Both the spleen and the stomach are vulnerable to the liver qi. If the liver is in an excess state, and/or the spleen and the stomach are weak, this can lead to gas, cramping, nausea, or irregularity. Emotions are usually at the root of this imbalance, and are exemplified by the classic "nervous stomach", or "butterflies in the stomach". Stomach yin can also become deficient causing thirst, insatiable appetite, and is classically considered the beginning of diabetes. Trouble with the spleen and stomach can be at the root of IBS and other chronic digestive disorders, allergies, diabetes, infertility, and anxiety.

Below are some foods that benefit the qi of the spleen and stomach. Remember to talk to an acupuncturist before making a radical change in your eating patterns, to make sure you have the correct diagnosis. (Below is a more comprehensive list of foods that affect the spleen, and help to control dampness)

Foods that tonify qi:

Grains: well-cooked rice, oats, millet, barley, spelt, sweet rice, pounded sweet rice (mochi)

Vegetables: parsnips, rutabagas, winter squash (butternut, acorn, pumpkin, etc.), carrots

Proteins: black beans, soy products, small amounts of nuts and seeds, meats (not fried, and only in moderate amounts)

Foods to minimize when qi deficient:

Naturally bitter foods: rye, asparagus, lettuce (especially raw), celery, and amaranth

Sweet foods: fruits, fruit juices, and sweetened or overly sweet foods

Excessive raw vegetables and sprouts

Cooling foods: tomato, spinach, chard, tofu, seaweeds, salt

3. Whole grains vs. whole grain bread...

More than once I have suggested to a patient that they add whole grains to their diet. On occasion, patients have responded that they already eat whole grain bread, whole grain cereal, etc. Something important to understand, while whole grain bread is much better than white bread, actually whole grains are categorically on a different level. Even the best bread has been processed, lowering its glycemic index (which causes blood sugar to rise faster), and for some, aggravates dampness. Grains themselves are balancing in nature, and digest slowly, giving sustained energy, and the high amount of fiber helps to clean the system. Examples are brown rice, oatmeal (not the instant kind), millet, quinoa, etc. Whole Foods and Central Market both wide selections of whole grains, and have small handbooks on how to cook them. And searching Google will find thousands of recipes. For vegetarians, it is good know that quinoa and amaranth have more protein than all the other grains.

4. Helpful people and books.

One of our favorite books on nutrition is called *Healing with Whole Foods*, by Paul Pitchford. This was one of our text books in school, and while a good reference book, it reads easily without oversimplification. I can't recommend this book enough. Some cook books we like are *Mostly Macro*, *Voluptuous Vegan*, and *Whole Foods* website.

Local organic foods can be found at Austin Farmer's Markets, Wheatsville, and several farms have delivery services, that will bring vegetables straight to your door.

Lately we have been trying food from the Soup Peddler, a local Austin company who delivers good natural food. The price is reasonable and they always have some healthy choices. All of their food has been fantastic. For this month of September, you can use this coupon code to get a discount off your order: zzyt0906. My only caveat with these folks is that I would like to see them use more organic ingredients, but their foods are all natural, and just plain good.

Hope you find this informative and useful. Look forward to seeing you soon.

Billy Zachary

More about Qi Deficiency, Dampness, and Phlegm

Below, I have provided some basic information about the causes and treatments of these conditions. Please pay close attention to the recommendations for diet and lifestyle. Making changes to eating and lifestyle habits can be difficult. The suggestions below should be adopted gradually, over time. If you find them overwhelming, preparing one meal a week following the guidelines. Better to adopt these changes in baby steps than to get frustrated trying to do everything at once and give up.

You are what you eat. As your diet improves, so will your health and joy. In time you will come to enjoy not just the natural flavors of the foods, but also the positive effect they have on your well-being.

Symptoms of qi deficiency, dampness and phlegm

When your body is in balance, it processes the foods you eat thoroughly. Unfortunately, when your body is out of balance, it can become tired, or qi-deficient. The foods' natural dampness may not be processed thoroughly, and may instead remain in the body, causing blockages.

Symptoms of qi deficiency can include fatigue, low energy, weakness, and loose stools. Dampness symptoms can include heaviness and sluggishness, arthritis, mental dullness, loss of appetite, nausea, edema, excess mucus and possible infections of yeast and other microorganisms. When dampness condenses and thickens, it can turn into phlegm. The symptoms of phlegm can include dizziness, nausea, vomiting, productive cough, nasal congestion, nodules, numbness, and insomnia. Dampness can lie at the root of some psychological disorders as well.

Lifestyle

As always, take time to enjoy food. How you eat can be as significant as what you eat. Always chew your food thoroughly before swallowing. Whenever possible, don't do other tasks while eating, don't eat too late, and avoid over-complicating your diet (ask me for information about food combinations). Lack of portion control, excessive snacking, and eating while emotionally distressed can also weaken qi and result in dampness. Daily light exercise and meditation can also be beneficial (yoga, tai chi and qi gong combine the benefits of both).

Here are some suggestions for modifying your diet. Don't forget, you don't have to eat all of these foods at once. Take your time, integrating them into an otherwise balanced diet of whole grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits.

Foods that tonify qi:

Grains: well-cooked rice, oats, millet, barley, spelt, sweet rice, pounded sweet rice (mochi)

Vegetables: parsnips, rutabagas, winter squash (butternut, acorn, pumpkin, etc.), carrots

Proteins: black beans, soy products, small amounts of nuts and seeds, meats (not fried, and only in moderate amounts)

Foods to avoid when qi deficient:

Naturally bitter foods: rye, asparagus, lettuce (especially raw), celery, and amaranth

Sweet foods: fruits, fruit juices, and sweetened or overly sweet foods

Excessive raw vegetables and sprouts

Cooling foods: tomato, spinach, chard, tofu, seaweeds, salt

Foods that reduce dampness:

Grains: amaranth, buckwheat, unrefined barley, corn, rye, wild rice, basmati rices (in small amounts), and dry roasted oats and grains

Vegetables: celery, lettuce, mushroom, papaya (underripe), pumpkin, radish, turnip, mustard greens, Chinese cabbage, watercress, kohlrabi, alfalfa, asparagus

Legumes: Aduki bean

Meats: clams

Sweeteners: raw honey (unprocessed is preferred, in small amounts)

Flavorings: lemon, lime, citrus peel, vinegar, chives, white pepper

Supplements: wild blue-green micro alga

Bitter herbs: chaparral, pau d'arco, valerian, and chamomile.

Cooking methods: water-saute, steaming or blanching, cooking in soups without heavy oil, fat or dairy

Foods to avoid when damp

Foods that promote dampness or mucus: dairy products, meats, eggs, tofu and other soy products, pineapple, salt, and concentrated sweeteners

Meats: sardine, pork, egg

Oils: none or very little for the person who is overweight or has damp conditions such as sluggishness, tumors, Candida yeast overgrowth, etc. However, these individuals can use omega-3 and GLA oils. Sources of GLA include spirulina micro-algae and the seeds of borage, black currant, and evening primrose.

Foods that reduce phlegm

For the most part, follow the same guidelines as those for dampness, but strictly avoid greasy, rich foods, and add some foods from the list below.

Fruits: persimmon

Seaweeds (hijiki, Irish moss, kombu/kelp, nori, wakame) and watercress

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.