

## Chinese dietetic therapy

The nutritional therapy in Chinese Medicine, or simply called food-therapy, was handed down by our ancestors experience after permanent struggle with diseases, and its rewards when applying food as a prophylactic to prevent diseases.

### 1. Origins

Our countries food-therapy goes back to the Hsia-Dynasty, more than 3000 years ago. Yi-Yi a high minister of the Shang-Dynasty emphasizes decoctions' value, especially as medicaments. In the *Tang Ye Lun* (discourse about decoctions and liquids) it was just the method of preparing soup that was used to treat diseases. And early in the Zhou-Dynasty the court had already the position of a "nutritionist" in the palace, who had to check the special relations between the nutritional intake and its influence on health' as well as the quality of food - not unlike the work done now by the American Food-Drug-Administration.

In a famous Chinese classic named *Qian Jin Yao Fang* ( Recipes of thousand gold coins value) one chapter is found especially about therapy with food. The books author compares: "Medicaments are ferocious like soldiers of the high guard, and hence should not be thoughtlessly applied in minor cases." Whereas "Food can dispel harmful influences, bequeath the internal organs, refresh the spirit and replenish the qi and blood."

It also advises: To cure a disease try first dietetics, if this doesn't help you can consider pharmaceutical treatment. He promoted the application of dietetics as well and especially in the geriatric treatments. The book contains food-therapy recipes and supportive nutritional methods and was later supplemented by Zhang Ding and changed to the name *Shi Liao Ben Cao* ( Materia medica of food therapy), and hereafter considered the basic classic about dietetics. In another book about old age and its nutrition, called *Lao Lao Xuan Nian* it is emphasized: Taking medicine to prevent diseases is not as good as preventing diseases by the well chosen foods and beverages." which is such, because the weakness of the old age is often resulting from the deficiency of the stomach and spleen-system and via those geriatric diseases can be prevented and cured as well.

As we can see from these few quotes above, the therapists from past to present have gained a long-term clinical, experimental experience of high value, with its theoretical results in nutritional health care, all in order to keep healthy and defeat aging and prolong life and so providing an abundance of reference materials. Nowadays the modern medicine and dietetics have risen to an almost perfect degree of theory and application of the food-therapy. The dieteticists methods are based on the traditional origins of food therapy

having tested a great amount found in foods chosen to strengthening the aging body and after having researched treatments of old age and prolonging life a lots of therapies spread from this root to benefit our happiness in the present days.

## 2. Application of the food therapy

### I. Supplementive nutrition

The functions of the stomach/spleen system decrease in old age, and the digestion system suffers from weakness, which all often results in a lack of essential nutritive factors and so finally leads to diseases. With food therapy those malfunctions can be corrected and moreover the necessary factors be reinstalled in order to regain the body's primary strength. The book *Shou Shi Bao Yuan* (Longevity by preserving the source) tells us about a powerful recipe, called *Yang Chun Bai Xue Gao* (Snow-white Lamb of the YANG Youth) consisting of Fu-ling Indian bread (*pachyma cocos*, *poria*), Euryalisseed, Yamaimoroot, Lotosseed\*,

mixed with rice, glutinous rice, some sugar etc. to form a small cake that, after drying is taken by old people or young women to enhance greatly the strength of spleen and kidney systems.

In order to harmonize functions of distorted organs, the organs of animals are also often used in TCM: Bovine pancreas for diabetes, pig's heart for treating angina pectoris and insomnia or sheep's thyroid glands for hypothyreosis to name a few. This kind of organ "substitute" therapy, also called organ treatment and has undergone clinical research and application with definite success.

\*=Chinese names: bai fu-ling, qian shi, huai shan yao, lian rou

### II. Harmonizing the equilibrium of organs

If the organs in the body become weaker, it is (as TCM defines) because of a loss of equilibrium between YIN and YANG, being the main reason for any resulting diseases. Food and beverage are able to correct this imbalance, in the same way a treatment should do. So by the right selection of food the organ systems' balance can be regained and it is only then, that a positive result by any treatment can be achieved easily, no matter which kind of therapy is applied.

Food therapy is often applied under varying circumstances of personal constitution, time, and disease. So if there is a "heat"-syndrome (often easily dry mouth, acne, hard stool, deep yellow urine etc.) or "heat" disease, cooling foods will be prescribed, as mung-beans, watermelons, pears, coicis seeds (*Yi yi ren*) etc. If a "cold"-syndrome is present (cool extremities, fear of cold temperature, diarrhea after eating cooled food etc.) or even a "cold" disease, then warming foods are recommended, such as ginger, garlic, deer meat and walnuts.

Seniors suffer often from vertigo and a dizzy feeling, caused by a YIN-deficiency of liver and kidney systems. In such cases a higher intake of shellfish and seafood is recommended.

Constipation and dry bowels call for more greasy foods containing vegetable oils, like almonds or pine seeds as well as for fibrous plant roots.

If the lung is affected and coughing prevails, white pears, lilly bulbs and ginkgo seeds ( bai xue li, bai he, bai guo) are of good use.

If the heart and the spleen system is deficient, cinnamon and red lychee are very useful. The medicine has to be arranged differently, according to each individuals body-constitution, with principles like "hot treats cold", "cold treats hot" a.s.o. in order to guarantee a predictable outcome of all cases in vivo.

### III. Food restrictions for seniors

The term suitable or unsuitable foods is referring to foods with medical properties that can or should be eaten in higher amounts or respectively foods that represent taboos, because of their harmful effects on the patient or the positive result of the therapy, which hence should be eaten only rarely or not at all.

Older persons with weakened spleen and stomach system functions especially after a disease have to pay even more attention to that, a fact, that is already known by the most people, which is why there are two common questions during the anamnesis often asked: What should I eat ? What is bad for me ? Being such shows that many people know about the importance of applied food therapy, and that they are willing to care about it - once they are ill.

#### **A. Classification of foods:**

According to TCM food, like medicine can be divided into the characteristics cold-hot-cool-warm, which when applied right, can help the patient to overcome an inclination to or even a manifested disease and thus achieve the same goal which medicaments would.

Here now a listing of often used foods with medical properties and their corresponding temperature-quality:

##### *a. Foods with warming qualities:*

Long-yan fruits: Support heart, calms down nervous system, nourishes blood, improves function of the spleen system

Lychee fruits: Sweet-warm quality with blood nourishing properties, in the

face blood circulation and moistness improves when often eaten.

Sugarcane: Supports the middle-abdomen area, relieves pain, moistens lung system, stops coughing

Lentils: strengthens spleen system, nourishes stomach system,

(string beans) transforms, dispells and moisturizes "summer heat" ( shu = overheated system)

Boxthorn: helps digestion, strengthens stomach system, revives and

(Shancha) revitalizes blood, transforms stagnation

Walnuts: Supports kidneys, helps the YANG, restrains (overactive)

lung system, calms breathing, moistens intestines, improves defecation

### **Other warming foods**

Grainproducts: Noodles, fermented rice, bean pickles, soy sauce, vinegar

Vegetables: Ginger, garlic, onion, chinese chives, coriander leaves, mustard, carrots, jiu bai (a kind of shallots grown covered to remain white)

Fruits: Plums, olives, papayas, black plums, chestnuts, grapes

Sugars: Honey, bleached and raw sugar

Meat: Chicken, duck, fowl, dog, goat, beef, deer, cat

Fish: Silver carp, shad, shrimps, eel, catfish

### *b. Foods with cooling properties*

Euryalis seeds: replenishes spleen system, prevents loose bowels, long application makes body light and improves the qi.

Green mungbeans : clears heat, detoxifies, dispels summer heat (shu), quietens

beans the troubled spirit

Elocharitis tuberositas (Water chestnut): dissolves phlegm, disintegrates massed swellings, clears

heat, increases secretions, reduces swellings of the thyroid gland

Chrysanthemum flowers : refreshes liver, clears eyes, dispels heat / wind symptoms

Mulberries : nourishes and raises Yin and blood, applied at deplete Yin

symptoms of kidney and liver system and for early grey hair

Lilly bulbs : moisten lung system, stop coughing

Kakifruit syrup: clears heat, quiets the troubled spirit, strengthens spleen system, transforms phlegm

Pears : when fresh cool heat symptoms, stop coughing, when cooked nourish the Yin and moisten dryness

Watermelon : quenches thirst, cools heat, dispel summer heat (shu), increases urination; the juice when regularly in high amounts applied cures edema and inflammation of the kidneys

### **Other cooling foods**

Grains : rice, oat, tofu, fermented soybeans, thick soy sauce

Tuberous vegetables : xian cai (kind of spinach), rape, Chinese cabbage, cucumber, bitter melon, bamboo sprouts, taros, eggplants

Fruits : water caltrops, lotos roots, sugar canes, ginkgo nuts, dried kakifruits

Game : meat of hare and deer

Sea fruit : eel, frog, lobster, turtle, tortoise, clam, oyster, etc.and misc.

### ***c. Neutral foods ( food with neither hot nor cold properties)***

Lotosseed : nourishes heart system, bequeaths mind, improves kidney

system, strengthens softened tissue, benefits health of spleen system, stops loose bowels

Euryalisseed: benefits kidney sys., strengthens and clears it, benefits health of spleen system, stops loose bowels

(A congee of the two above cures diarrhea and spermatorrhea)

Black seed : nourishes and improves kidney and liver system, moistens of sesame dry bowels and improves their secretion, in order to improve defecation of old people and patients with chronic constipation

Wheat : nourishes heart sys., calms spirit, often with jujube fruits and liquorice applied for restlessness, insomnia and unquiet dreams. For all post menopausal syndromes, wheat is recommended to be taken in a long term for a very beneficial effect.

Yam root (Yucca): supplements spleen- and stomach- , improves kidney- and lung systems. For prevention of symptoms accompanying diabetes, chronic asthma, coughing children, it should be prepared as tea and drunk twice a day.

Jujube fruit: supplements and improves spleen- and stomach system, nourishes blood, calms spirit

Other neutral foods

Grains : glutinous rice, polished round grained non-glutinous rice (jing mi), black beans, soy beans, peas

Tuberous vegetables: calabash, pumpkin

Fruits : pipa, green plums, peanuts

Game : pork, wild goose (yan)

Sea fruit : carp, cuttlefish

## **B. Characteristics and taboos of some foods**

The characteristics of food and their taboos

The food and beverage that we daily consume (be it of hot or of cold character) should be chosen differently according to different constitutions and diseases. Therefore the different characteristics and their appropriate and inappropriate applications are listed below:

### **1. Hot and spicy food:**

Onions, ginger, Chinese chives, chili, pepper, etc. which belong to foods with warm/hot characteristics are in small amounts able to increase bowel movement and defecation and hence recommended for patients with depleted and cold symptoms of stomach and spleen systems, suffering from sudden and large watery stools with pain. Eating too much of it can cause phlegm, fire and wind symptoms and harm the eyesight.

Furthermore they should not be consumed by patients with the following diseases:

- a. Symptoms of depletion and YIN in kidney and liver systems such as insomnia, hypertension, blurred vision and a hot temper.
- b. Blood related symptoms: bleeding purpura, menorrhagia patients should all eat this food in only small amounts.
- c. Phlegm related symptoms: Patients with humid asthma during the hot seasons bearing a yellowish, tenacious phlegm that is hard to cough out.
- d. Eye related symptoms: patients with loss of eyesight, red or bloodshot eyes in relation with high blood pressure, will also find hot and spicy foods to be unsuitable for them in larger amounts.
- e. Abscess and furuncle related symptoms: Especially swollen, red and acute periods of carbuncles and furuncles.

### **2. Fresh and cool food:**

All leguminous fruits and raw vegetables, cool drinks, etc. belong to cool-cold foods are able to clear hot and warm symptoms and can increase production of body fluids, hence suit for symptoms like thirst, pain when swallowing, constipation and dark yellow urine.

They are not recommended for patients with depletion and cold caused belly-ache, diarrhea, vomiting etc.

Patient often note that when they drink cooled drinks, cold watermelon or banana etc., they have almost immediately afterwards abdominal pain with an urging bowel-movement that causes them to rush to toilet with a slight diarrhea, which all are indications of an vacuity and deplete stomach and spleen system.

### **3. Greasy and fat food:**

Animal fat and roasted food with rich and heavy taste can produce heat and phlegm and so harm stomach and spleen system. Patients with a feeling of external heat and sudden watery stools in huge amounts should avoid those kind of food. For those with liver diseases, stroke, diabetes, chronic stomach and intestinal diseases these foods are also on the taboo list.

### **4. Food with high allergenic factors:**

Animals including carp, shrimps, scabbard fish (a kind of eel), dog-meat, pork, rooster, beef, pork as well as among vegetables mushrooms, pumpkin, liquorice buds and leaves (huang hua cai), coriander (yuan sui), etc. all belong to phlegm, fire and wind symptom producing food. Patients with Hypertension, corona diseases, artero-sclerosis and such are better not to eat too much of it, since it would increase the fire/wind symptoms present. Eating too plenty of them much can furthermore cause purulent abscessa, urticaria, tuberculosis, hematoemesis and other blood stirring, fiery diseases.