

# *Introduction: Chinese Dietary Therapy in a Western practice*

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Although most of the concepts used in TCM are as relevant in the modern West as when they evolved in China, some adaptation is necessary. This chapter aims to set the book in a Western context and also to clarify some of the terms used.

## **THE CONCEPT OF QI**

Underpinning Chinese Medicine is the notion of Qi. The literal meaning, 'breath' or 'vapour', indicates an intangible immaterial quality; yet the term covers such substantial substances as Blood, and the quality of the Qi may be clearly observed in the material with which it interacts. The radiant face of a healthy person and the wholesome smell and flavor of properly grown produce reflect the unseen Qi which invigorates them. The Qi of the Seasons combines with the Qi of the earth to produce food that reflects this interaction. Traditional diets and cooking methods are based on an understanding of these processes (think of salads in summer or hot stews of root vegetables in the winter). Similarly as humans settle in different geographical locations the foods they traditionally eat reflect an awareness of the need to balance the Qi of food with the Qi of the environment. Thus Eskimos subsist on warming fatty meats whilst people in the Tropics consume large amounts of lush, cooling fruits.

In food, as in all natural phenomena as a whole, we may be constantly aware of the behavior of Qi, and Chinese Dietary Therapy depends upon the interaction of food Qi with that of the body.

## **FOOD OR MEDICINE?**

There is a wide spectrum in the therapeutic effects of foods and medicinal herbs, ranging from relatively mild staple foods, which may be consumed regularly and frequently to nourish the body, to extremely strong and possibly poisonous substances used exclusively in herbal medicine. A rough indication of the qualities of a food or herb is the strength of taste. This could be seen to represent the relative amount of Qi contained within the food or herb. Generally, mild flavored foods are consumed as staples (grains and pulses, for example), while foods and drinks with stronger taste (tea, coffee, spices and condiments, etc.) are used less frequently because they have more of a medicinal effect (Figure 1).

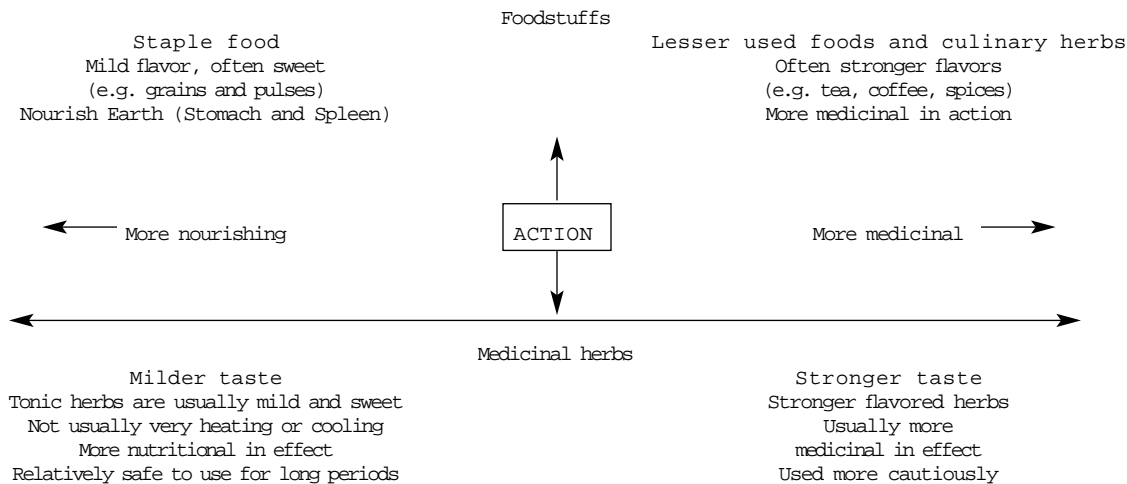


Fig. 1 Medicinal effects of foods and herbs.

The same principles apply to medicinal herbs, only a wider range of effects is involved. Qi and Blood tonics, for instance, have a sweet taste, are usually fairly mild in flavor and do not have a pronounced heating or cooling effect. With certain provisos, they may be taken over long periods of time with relative safety and are often found on sale as single herbs (Chinese angelica, milkvetch and ginseng, for example). Even within this category the slightly stronger and more pungent taste of Chinese angelica indicates its ability to move rather than purely tonify Blood.

Yin and Jing tonics are similar, with a slightly different range of tastes but still a relatively mild flavor and relatively few contraindications. It is only when we look at Yang tonics that we begin to find some strong tastes, and their dynamic action and the longer list of contraindications reflect these qualities. They are rarely used alone and inappropriate use may produce ill effects relatively quickly, so they fall into an intermediate stage, closer to medicinal herbs than to foods.

Herbs with a strong flavor and a strongly Hot or Cold nature normally have a more obvious medicinal rather than nutritional effect. They are used less frequently and for shorter periods of time and may need to be moderated by other herbs.

So we can see a gradual progression from staple foods, which nourish in a stable way, through tonic herbs which have much in common

with food, to Yang tonics and strong-tasting foods and drinks which have more of a medicinal effect. Finally come the purely medicinal herbs with a strong taste and a powerful action, which therefore need more caution in their use.

It is easy to see, then, why foods are so useful for slowly and gently supporting a person's Qi and also how they may reinforce or temper the effects of herbs used medicinally.

The following section deals with the nature of foods in terms of heating and cooling properties. The emphasis in TCM Dietary Therapy is on combining compatible foods rather than balancing foods of opposite natures. For instance, Warm foods will reinforce Warm herbs, while Cold foods would work against them. In everyday diet, however, there are many examples of the use of 'incompatible' combinations. The Warm nature of ginger helps to offset the Cold nature of melon, while yogurt is traditionally used to moderate the Hot nature of curries. In hot climates curries will induce perspiration and Cold fruits will balance the hot conditions, so the main foods are appropriate and the additions can give a finer balance. In temperate climates, it is better to avoid strongly Hot or Cold foods altogether as far as possible. A useful analogy is that of a seesaw with the most strongly heating and cooling foods at either end and those with a milder effect towards the middle.

It is far easier to keep a balance if the bulk of

the diet is drawn from foods near the fulcrum, with progressively less taken from the stronger-acting foods towards the ends. A patient with Cold symptoms could be encouraged to take predominantly more Neutral food (such as rice, soy beans or maize) with some Warm additions rather than trying to balance a Cold diet by adding Hot items. Too much Hot or Cold food will just disrupt the Qi of the body.

## HOT AND COLD

The nature of foods (Hot, Cold, Cool, Warm or Neutral) is a fundamental principle in Chinese Dietary Therapy and a chart showing some examples is shown in Figure 2.

As you will see from the text, the nature of food can be affected by cooking. In general terms, frying and roasting in oil increase the heating properties of food, while baking has a similar, but less marked effect (baked foods often have a drying effect, especially on the colon).

You should note that when the term 'roasting' is applied to the ingredients used in herbal preparations it means dry-roasting in a pan over a flame. Steaming and boiling slightly counteract any cooling properties of food, but will also help to moderate the effects of some Warm or Hot foods because of the watery component. For example, raw peanuts have a Neutral nature and a propensity for the channels of the Spleen and Lung. They are also able to reinforce Spleen Qi, moisten the Lungs and dissolve Phlegm. Once they have been roasted in oil, however, they develop a distinctly Warm to Hot nature and may

Heating foods	Cooling foods
Dispel Cold	Clear Heat and toxins
Tonify Yang Qi	Tonify Yin fluids
Nourish Qi	Tranquillize Heart Fire
May increase Heat	Calm Liver Yang
May induce Fire	May damage Yang Qi,
Can damage Yin Body	especially the Stomach
and	
Fluids (e.g. in stomach,	Spleen, Heart or Kidney
Liver or Lungs)	
Examples	Examples
Chillies	Watermelon
Mustard	Cucumber

Fig. 2 Hot and Cold foods.

actually create Phlegm. Lamb, on the other hand, has a Warm nature but if cooked in the traditional Greek way, where it is 'sweated' very slowly with the addition of a little lemon juice in a covered container, its heating nature is moderated. Herbs which are used for cooling and moistening are often administered in their fresh state (turnip juice, purslane, etc.) and even the relatively gentle process of drying them will modify their cooling and moistening nature to some extent.

How about freezing or microwaving? Well, food eaten frozen or chilled obviously has a Cold effect quite apart from its original nature. Iced drinks, cold milk, spring water from the fridge – they are all common items in the diets of many patients and should definitely be considered if you are questioning or giving dietary advice. If the patient's problem involves Cold or Yang Deficiency then simple changes in habits can make a big difference to their health and it is surprising how many people have never considered the effects of such behavior.

Microwaving is another widespread factor which is obviously not mentioned in the classics and the effects are not clearcut. On the one hand moisture is liberated during cooking and it is difficult to brown many foods which points to an effect similar to steaming. However, foods containing sugar or fat cook very rapidly and it is quite possible to caramelize sugar. Any food or drink which has been microwaved is capable of producing vicious burns or scalds if it is consumed straight from the cooker, so more of a heating effect is indicated. On balance the main effect seems more akin to steaming with all that implies, but some foods at least may have a Hot nature superimposed. From a purely Western standpoint, some modern research gives us pause for thought before we use microwaves for any sort of cookery. When human milk is microwaved even to below the temperature of blood heat some of the antibodies normally present are destroyed (Raloff 1992). Maybe those gut instincts were justified....

## MACROBIOTICS

Many people come to Chinese medicine, and

particularly Chinese dietetics, via an interest in macrobiotics and have to reconcile the Chinese concepts with those they already know. The term 'macrobiotics' was coined by George Ohsawa (1968) to describe an application of the Yin/Yang principle to health, diet and life in general. He developed the system during the 1960s from his very individual understanding of the Japanese interpretation of Chinese philosophy and science. Unfortunately many people are driven to distraction in trying to reconcile the two systems. Macrobiotics takes a much more reductionist view than TCM and classes foods purely in terms of Yin/Yang. The problem is that Ohsawa's ideas of what constituted Yin or Yang qualities do not always coincide with the general consensus (for instance, the expansive upward qualities of Yang in Chinese medicine are considered to be relatively Yin in terms of macrobiotics).

Anyone looking for tidy solutions might be tempted to class Hot and Warm foods as more Yang and Cold and Cool foods as more Yin, but there are many glaring exceptions to this rule. For instance, salt is considered to be extremely Yang in terms of macrobiotics yet in TCM it has a Neutral or Cool nature, is moistening and will lead other herbs to tonify the Kidney Yin. On the other hand, spices such as ginger and garlic which are manifestly Warm and Yang in nature in terms of Chinese medicine, are classified as Yin in macrobiotics. Each of the systems has its merits, but because of these inconsistencies the two are probably best kept separate.

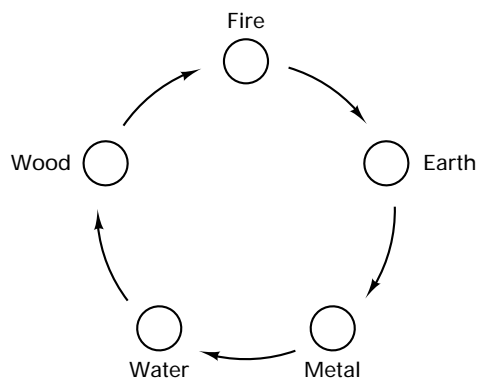
If macrobiotics has a difficult time reconciling its ideas with those of TCM, theories from other cultures do not always fare better and often allocate different natures to foods. To an Iranian bananas are very Warm, yet they are Cold in Chinese medicine; while in Ayurvedic medicine rose is distinctly cooling and in TCM it has a slightly Warm nature. We can assume in both cases that the use to which the plant is put determines the nature assigned to it. Unfortunately, but perhaps inevitably, there is disagreement even among contemporary writers. Bob Flaws (1991), for instance, assigns a Cold nature to coffee based on its downward action on the colon and the fact that its diuretic action causes Qi, and therefore warmth, to be lost. Most other authors

note its effect on mobilizing Yang within the body, possibly contributing to Liver Yang or Liver Fire and aggravating such symptoms as febrile Painful Obstruction Syndrome and migraine headaches. These qualities would point more to a Hot nature. Some foods even appear to have a homoeopathic effect. For instance, baked crabs clear Damp and Heat when used medicinally, yet crab is commonly seen to aggravate skin conditions such as urticaria which involve the same factors.

What is the moral? Remember Chinese medicine takes a flexible approach.

### FIVE ELEMENTS – PHILOSOPHY AND PRAGMATISM

Most practitioners will be familiar with the Five Tastes from the point of view of the Five Elements (Figure 3). In this book, as in current TCM, the Elements, their associated qualities and their interrelationships are applied when appropriate but are discarded when they are not useful descriptions of observed life. In Dietary Therapy, for example, the propensity of a food or herb to enter a particular acupuncture channel is deduced more from its precise action in the body and does not always correspond with the organ system classically associated with one of the Five Tastes according to the Five Element system. Emotions tend to run high in some acupuncture circles



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Fig. 3 The Five Flavors and the Five Yin Organs.

when the Five Elements are mentioned and as there have been some lengthy discussions on the relative merits of the system by authors such as Giovanni Maciocia (1989) and Ted Kaptchuk (1983) we will resist the temptation to join in or to elaborate on basic Five Elements theory.

However, the Five Tastes associated with the Organs *do* have a place in diagnosis and in treatment. Most early sources agree that overconsumption of any one taste will have undesirable effects and the rationale is straightforward. Moderate amounts of a given taste will strengthen the function of the associated Yin Organ and tissues (often a craving for a particular flavor will point to a problem with the related Organ). Overintake actually impairs its function and may also cause it to overact on the related Organ according to the Control Cycle (see Fig. 4). For instance, moderate intake of sour flavor nourishes the Wood element and thus the Liver and also the tendons. An excess of the same flavor will have a harmful effect on the tendons first of all and then the Liver Qi overacts to suppress the Spleen. This in turn damages the tissue associated with the second Organ (in this case, the flesh will become withered and the lips dry). For more information on this theme refer to the Nature and taste of food in chapter 2.

Food Qi is considered ultimately to form the various tissues of the body and the taste of the food will determine which Organ, sphere of activity and tissue will be affected. Further advice from the classics generally consists of using particular tastes to nourish, support or control specific Organs in terms of Five Element

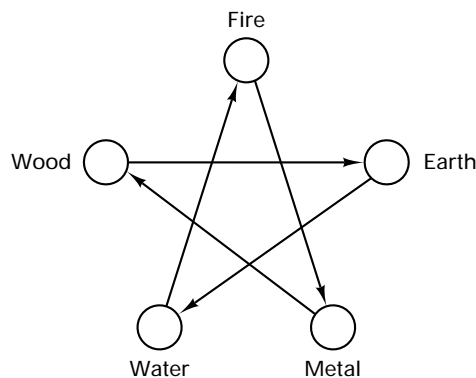


Fig. 4 The Control Cycle.

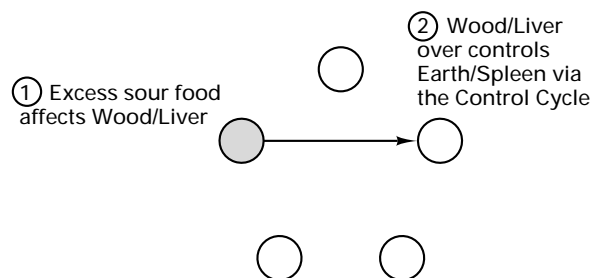


Fig. 5. Effects of an excess of sour food.

relationships and eating a balanced range of the Five tastes to provide a healthy regime. As with Hot and Cold foods, moderation is the keynote and milder flavored foods such as grains, pulses and staple vegetables should form the central part of the diet, with progressively stronger tasting foods being eaten more sparingly.

So far, so good. It is when the therapeutic actions of the foods are discussed that contradictions begin to appear. The Liver (Wood) has a spreading quality, while the Lungs (Metal) tend to harden and contract. The sour flavor associated with the Liver, however, is astringent while the pungent flavor of the Lungs tends to disperse. Likewise bitter flavors, although they dry, also tend to cool and have a downward movement rather than the hot upward action you might expect from the Fire element.

Given these apparent contradictions it is understandable that 5 elements theory is used selectively. It is an elegant and useful system which underlies a surprising amount of TCM, but it is manmade and cannot be used as a rigid set of universally applicable rules.

## FASTING, APPETITE AND ALLERGIES

Fasting is not normally recommended in modern Chinese medicine, as it is considered to deplete the Stomach and Spleen. In Chapter 32 of *The Spiritual Axis* we are treated to a graphic account of how a healthy person would die after just 7 days of fasting. This contrasts with the naturopathic approach in the West which concentrates on ridding the body of toxins and uses fasting of one sort or another as a major form of treatment. There are pros and cons for each approach and in

illness it is possible to be guided by a person's appetite. In acute conditions it is normal to treat the Biao, or obvious manifestation of a disease, as this is normally reliable, and if a person has no appetite at all they are usually better for fasting. If, however, they have a strong desire for a particular taste, then it may reflect a Deficiency and foods of that taste are likely to be helpful for them. In chronic disease we pay attention to the Ben, or root of the problem, and this is not necessarily obvious. It could be a distorted appetite which has contributed to the condition, either through an excess of a particular type of food affecting its related Internal Organ, or through overconsumption of exotic foods which leads to chaotic behavior of Qi and perversion of the normal appetite. In this case the patient may crave the very foods they should be avoiding, and it is interesting to see how often a person's favorite foods are those to which they are allergic or sensitive. This also reflects our national habits: milk products, refined wheat products, tea, coffee, orange juice and sugar usually head the lists when food sensitivity and allergy are discussed, and they are all consumed in large quantities.

A useful guideline for the correct amounts of food to be taken is to consider what would be available in natural circumstances and how much one would be inclined to eat if one had to prepare it from its raw state. Not everybody realizes, for instance, that a carton of orange juice contains the juice from 15 oranges and very few people would eat 50 grams of brazil nuts if they had to crack them all. Whole oranges can be very useful medicinally and brazil nuts are fine in small amounts, but problems are frequently seen in people who consume orange juice by the glass daily or eat shelled nuts by the handful.

Muesli is another concentrated food and is very popular in the West, yet many patients suffer from problems which include Spleen Qi Deficiency, and uncooked cereals and nuts are the last thing they should be consuming, particularly if (as is so often the case) sugar is included in the recipe. It is interesting to note that the original Bircher-Benner recipe for muesli was based mainly around grated apple, with a minimal amount of cereal included.

## FOOD PRODUCTION IN THE WEST

Historically most countries have adulterated foods in some way or another and China is no exception. However, the amount of adulteration which was likely when the earlier texts were prepared in China pales in comparison with modern Western production methods. This should be borne in mind when using and recommending foods and also when considering the daily intake of patients. In Dietary Therapy we are dealing specifically with the Qi which is taken in the form of food and drink and everything involved in the production of food will affect this.

If a vegetable such as a carrot has been produced by intensive farming methods using chemicals to force quick growth and protect against pests it may look perfect while being virtually tasteless. Many Westerners have never enjoyed the completely different flavour of a carrot grown in good soil in its own time. When we consider that the flavour of each food is an indicator of its Qi and its therapeutic action we can understand the importance of food which tastes right as well as looking appealing.

By using the traditional Four Examinations and especially that of observation, it quickly becomes clear that a person's Qi reflects not only their lifestyle in general but their food intake. Someone with a balanced diet of healthily produced food will have a clear and radiant complexion compared with a person living on devitalized foods and stimulants. If we look at more of the modern factors involved in food production the devitalizing effects of adulterated foods on the body should become clearer.

Foods which are highly processed need to have artificial flavouring added to compensate for the loss of taste (and Qi) which occurs during processing. The end product may be so strong in taste that we gradually lose our natural ability to appreciate subtle differences in taste and our judgement of the food quality. Many studies have shown that the average Westerner prefers very strongly flavored food even when the flavoring is artificial. Is there a solution? One answer is to restrict the range of foods consumed for a while. Many people do this inadvertently

by using one of the many diets currently being promoted (food combining, grape fasts and food allergy elimination diets, for example). After even a short period on one of these regimes, a person's natural ability to discriminate flavor recovers and many people find they begin to avoid or drastically reduce the amounts of some of the less useful foods they were taking in previously.

### ADDED VALUE?

It is in the interests of manufacturers in the West to increase the profits gained from foods by adding fats, salt or sugar. Why these three ingredients? Fat is used in processing foods which are broken down into smaller components and can thus be sold for a higher price weight for weight. Added sugar and salt increase consumption when they are added to foods for reasons that are particularly interesting from a Chinese dietary perspective. Many people in the West have poor dietary habits (irregular meals, unbalanced diets, eating without resting afterwards, etc.) and as a result their Spleen Qi easily becomes deficient. In this situation the desire for sweet foods, which would nourish the Spleen is increased and if strongly sweet food is available the person is usually drawn to it. Unfortunately the excess of strong sweet flavor does nothing to nourish the Spleen, instead it damages it, and the continued craving creates a vicious circle. If the person works hard and continues to push themselves their Kidney Qi could become depleted and a craving for salt will develop. A small amount of salty food will stimulate the Kidneys and give a temporary increase in energy, but once again an excess will do nothing to actually nourish the Kidneys and the outcome is an exhausted and undernourished body. Nourishing the Spleen Qi by using small regular meals, including mildly sweet food such as root vegetables, and avoiding very strong flavors will usually help to bring a person back to balance.

Sugar has useful medicinal properties but it is often included as an ingredient in herbal drinks purely for extra flavor. Unless it is a necessary ingredient, it is probably better to exclude it.

### FRESH OR TAINTED?

The eating of whole fruits and vegetables including the skins obviously makes a lot of sense in terms of nutrients, but once again the old rules do not apply in the modern West. Orthodox farming methods create serious problems caused by pesticides and antifungal sprays and by chemicals used to preserve foods during storage. Washing is not always sufficient to remove some of the wax-based preparations sprayed onto fruit during the growing period, for instance, and the sensible approach might be to peel food unless it is known to come from an organic source.

Pickling and drying foods to preserve them have a long history but there are many methods available in the West which are very recent. Frozen food has only been in common use for the last 40 years or so, and even canning and bottling are relatively modern. Irradiation of food has only just been introduced in Britain and certainly does not figure in any Chinese text.

Each of these techniques makes its impact on the fresh food. Bottled carrots and peas, for instance, sold very badly when customers could see the dull colour of the cooked product, and most cookery books contain sections on how badly various foods fare once frozen. From a TCM perspective all of these methods will affect the Qi of the food. Once something has been preserved in this way and is left open to the elements again, it will normally deteriorate very quickly – an indication of the lack of Qi contained within the food. This is particularly marked in irradiated food, which may look perfectly fresh when viewed through a sealed plastic container but will deteriorate very rapidly once opened because its naturally protective organisms have been destroyed by the irradiation (the equivalent of destroying its Defensive Qi). From a nutritional point of view it is the ability to support all aspects of bodily Qi which is affected by preserving. You could view it as suspending the vitalizing quality of the Qi.

One of the drawbacks of both the preservation and the easy transport of food is that it is possible to eat foodstuffs which are inappropriate for a given season or country. It is hardly surprising that the person with Spleen Yang deficient symp-

toms suffers during the winter if they are living on salads and tropical fruits. One of the most sensible guidelines in macrobiotics is to eat food which grows within a few hundred miles of one's home and which is either in season or can be easily stored without elaborate treatment. British macrobiotics would not be eating rice or soya products if this were the case, but in general terms the principle is very sound.

## FOOD AND THE SEASONS

A good guide to the appropriate foods for any season is what types of food would normally be growing at that time. During spring and summer flowers and leaves are abundant and their nature is to float the Qi. Light, leafy vegetables are easily available and succulent fruits and vegetables are commonly consumed. The actions of these foods help to relax the skin and muscles, to cool the body and to protect and nourish the body fluids (see Figs 6 and 7). During autumn and winter,

fruits are drying, seeds are being formed and in nature the energy is tending to concentrate more in the roots of plants; it will be seen that their energy tends to sink. The fruits will help to reinforce and moisten the Lungs, which predominate in autumn, while rooty vegetables and seeds help to strengthen the Kidneys during the winter.

## FOODS, FADS AND DIETS

In the West there is a problem with people becoming obsessive about food. The modern tendency is to concentrate on foods and medicines which can be taken by mouth and possibly to disregard other factors affecting health. As a practitioner, it is necessary to be cautious about giving dietary advice in case patients take it to extremes. A common question people will ask is 'Is this food good or bad?'. This reflects the linear thinking of Westerners and it is always worth explaining to patients that particular foods are appropriate or inappropriate for a given situation rather than being inherently good or bad. It is all too easy to fall back on lists of do's and don'ts in diet and this is far removed from the flexibility of TCM. Reference to the use of Chinese herbs and their specific actions, can often make the concept of dietary advice easier for patients to understand.

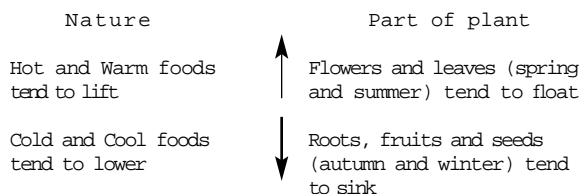


Fig. 6 Actions of foods.

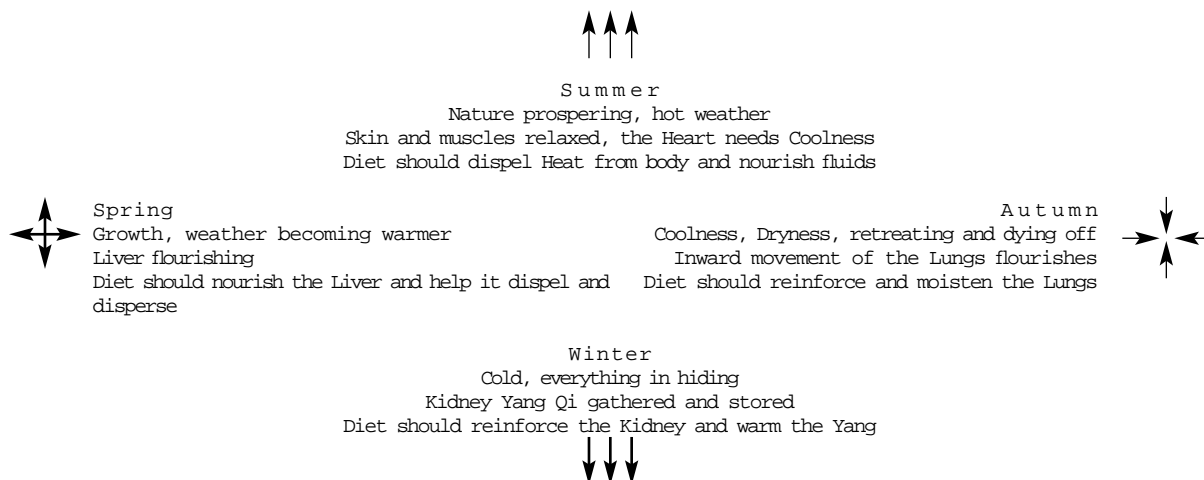


Fig. 7 Foods and the seasons.

Faddism is common and care needs to be taken when questioning patients about food in order to get a clear idea of a person's natural appetites. All too often the reply is dictated by what the person thinks they should be eating rather than what they would actually like.

## MEAT AND VEGETABLES

It is interesting to note that meat plays an important part in Chinese diet. Although large quantities are not necessarily consumed, it is considered to be one of the most useful foods for supplementing deficient Qi and particularly Blood. An informal New England study found that the addition of small quantities of meat, or poultry, to the diets of female vegetarians who were infertile through Blood deficiency led to pregnancy in a significant proportion of cases even when Chinese herbs had not helped (Valaskitgis 1978). Obviously in many cultures there are millions of healthy vegetarians, and careful choice of foods will usually compensate for the lack of meat in the diet. A problem in the West, however, is that many people assume that becoming a vegetarian automatically leads to health and spiritual development, and some people avoid meat, but eat rubbish. Mention of the fact that Hitler was a vegetarian and that food helps to form our material and energetic framework may be helpful in these cases.

## COW'S MILK

Milk's sweet taste, neutral nature and propensity for the channels of the Lung and Stomach all indicate that it should be a useful tonic, so it is no surprise that it is commonly used to nourish Qi and Blood when deficiency gives rise to dizziness and fatigue.

The ability to nourish Yin fluids makes the occasional administration of milk useful in treating thirst and constipation from Dryness. Milk also reinforces the descending function of the Stomach, counteracting difficult swallowing and vomiting but this, combined with its concentrated nourishing properties and tendency to

lubricate, means that it may overload a weak Spleen and give rise to Damp or Phlegm. For these reasons the use of milk is more appropriate for recuperation from illness (especially cases such as pulmonary tuberculosis involving Yin deficiency) rather than for general use. From my own experience, I would suggest that modern cow's milk has a relatively Cool nature and that it will deplete Spleen Yang if taken in large amounts.

Whatever the nature, the Phlegm-producing effects may be modified by taking garlic or ginger with the milk.

### Milk as medicine or disease factor

Whole unpasteurized milk from cows reared naturally is a very concentrated food capable of forming a substantial calf very quickly. As such, it is easy to see how Chinese medicine came to view its main therapeutic uses. In the West, too, it has always played an important part in traditional medicine and has been successfully used in the treatment of such problems as pulmonary tuberculosis and gastric ulcers.

Despite this background, milk has had a very bad press over the past few decades and a look at the differences between its use in China and Europe may make the reasons clearer.

### Overconsumption

Traditionally the consumption of milk was quite moderate for most of the population, however in recent times intensive farming methods and increasing economic reliance on the dairy industry have created a massive supply in the West and a subsequent overconsumption. It is well known that races such as the Japanese identify Europeans by the sour milk smell they exude. The excessive consumption of dairy products may well be a reason for the rapid increase in the average height of Western children over the last few decades, and is almost certainly implicated in the growing number of milk-related diseases. Studies of conditions as wide-ranging as chronic rhinitis, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis and even delinquency (Kaptchuk & Croncher 1986, Samuelsson et al 1991, Riordan et al 1993, Seignnlet 1992) have all implicated milk prod-

ucts as triggers. If we consider Phlegm, Damp and deficient Spleen Qi or Yang as the possible results of high intake, we can usually understand the connection.

### **Adulteration**

Overconsumption is not the only factor, however—the product consumed today is far removed from the original. Even 26 years ago a well-respected writer on naturopathy (Hewlett Parson 1968) qualified his inclusion of milk in a book with the proviso that whole unadulterated milk was very difficult to find and that it would be far better not to go near the product if it was not the real thing. The main differences are as follows:

#### *Pasteurization*

The pasteurization process, and particularly the UHT heat treatment used in long-life milk, appear to greatly increase the tendency to cause Phlegm in those who are susceptible (probably by making it more difficult for those with weak Stomach and Spleen to transform it). Many well-respected Western practitioners have documented the effects of treated versus untreated milk and whenever milk is recommended as a dietary supplement, they specify unpasteurized milk from untreated healthy cows.

#### *Homogenization*

This process distributes the fat more uniformly and has been implicated in a variety of conditions which in Western terms would relate to the gut, but in TCM would involve the Spleen. As the fat particles are smaller, they are more readily absorbed by the small intestine and may thus bypass a natural barrier in sensitive individuals. Whole milk does not present this problem.

#### *Antibiotics*

Intensive farming has meant an increase in infections and antibiotics are frequently given to

cows. It is a matter of debate whether any active residues pass on in pasteurized milk but there are always financial pressures for farmers to allow milk from heavily dosed cows to be collected before the medication has fully cleared. Some authors consider these residues to be a factor in the sensitivity to dairy foods which seems so common in developed countries.

#### *Animal feeds*

Bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE) is just one result of feeding cows animal byproducts such as sheep's brain and spinal cord. Cows are herbivores and it is hardly surprising that such obscene methods rebound on the producers.

Growth hormones are still added to the feeds of selected herds and as their identity is allowed to be kept secret, nobody knows where the pooled milk ends up or what the long-term effects on humans are likely to be.

### **Baby food**

Babies have an inherently weak Earth. It is not until they are around 7 years old that the Stomach and Spleen are considered to be fully consolidated. Their Postnatal Qi depends on proper functioning of the Stomach and Spleen, yet they have relied until birth upon the Prenatal Qi of the mother nourishing them directly. Mother's milk is obviously the correct food for young babies and usually presents no problems to their digestive systems. However, modern pressures and preferences often result in the child having to transform something meant originally for a growing calf. As a result, the Earth is often weakened and chronic Phlegm problems may result, often with a specific intolerance of cow's milk. The use of cow's milk should be reserved for emergencies only in babies and younger children and if it has to be used, then a little ginger or garlic should be given to help balance the Phlegm-producing effects.

Added together, these modern factors go a long way to explain the discrepancy between the original uses for cow's milk and the reputation it has today. How much longer this will remain the case depends largely on consumers making clear

demands for good quality products and on good quality information, rather than marketing propaganda.

### Dairy products and soya milk

Milk may be processed into other products and this will affect the nature to some extent, but broadly speaking if a person is affected by milk then soft dairy foods such as buttermilk, yogurt, cottage cheese and related foods are all likely to have a similar effect. This should be borne in mind before advising yogurt after antibiotics. Skimmed milk products may be marginally less of a problem, but many slimmers have found to their cost that their Spleens do not thrive on such a diet.

Butter, hard cheeses and pungent cheeses such as Stilton seem relatively slightly Warmer. If the background problem includes deficient Spleen Yang, they may have slightly less effect than the other dairy products, but they will exacerbate Phlegm-Heat problems.

Milk from sheep and goats is increasingly used and as it is usually produced on a small scale from free-roaming animals, it is far less likely to be contaminated. Some producers are able to sell

it unpasteurized and it is not surprising that many milk-sensitive people are able to consume moderate amounts of these products without problems. In larger quantities, however, similar problems occur and moderation should be the rule.

Soya milk is now widely available and, as you will see from the section on soya beans, has similar properties to cow's milk, except that instead of entering the Lung channel, it tonifies the Spleen. This means it is less Damp and Phlegm-producing in moderate amounts. When it is made into tofu, it is often considered to have a more lubricating and Cool nature and in parts of Indonesia is considered appropriate for quelling the sexual desire of celibate monks. Be warned!

I hope these notes, along with the main text, will help Western practitioners to begin using a fascinating and valuable therapy. Books have a way of crystallizing information which should really remain flexible. Please accept the ideas given in this introduction as indicators and starting points for your own studies and if any of the theory does not hold true in practice, then see how it needs to be modified to keep it alive and dynamic in the true spirit of Chinese medicine.

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