

Oriental Dietetics

In oriental dietetics, the consumption of appropriate food often forms part of a treatment program and is generally recommended to maintain good health and *Nourish Life*.

Some foods, such as ginger, cinnamon, red dates and shallots are regularly used in herbal preparations. Every food is described in terms of its *nature* and *flavour*. The *nature* of a particular food is a measure of its *yin yang* balance, determined by its effect on the body once ingested. *Yang* stimulates and engenders heat, *yin* calms and cools the organs. (And the way we cook a food alters its nature.) So all food exists on a continuum:
COOL>MILDLY COOL>NEUTRAL>MILDLY WARM>WARM

The foods we eat can help support the body's innate healing ability and return it to *yin/yang* balance.

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In general, it is preferable that most of our food is *neutral*, with small quantities of hot and cold foods in balance.

Cool - Cold	Neutral	Warm - Hot
Melons+	PPlum	Green Cabbage
Apples	Date	Pigs Liver
Pears	Apricots	Oats
Pork	White	Onion+
Barley	Cabbage	Figs
Cucumbers	Mushrooms	Chicken
Celery	Potatoes	Coffee
Cheese	Rice	Radish
Grapefruit	Corn	Red Beans
Mussels	Broad Beans	Orange
Bitter Gourd+	Peas	Grapes
Bamboo Shoots	Eggs	Mint Tea
Banana+	Black Tea	Carrots
Sugar cane	Strawberries	Brussels Sprouts
Celery	Leeks	Brown Sugar
Lemon	Beef	Caraway
Spinach	Coconut	Chestnut
Aubergine	Abalone	Chive
Lettuce	Duck	Cinnamon+
Crab	Sweet Potato	Clove+
Green Tea	PawPaw	Nutmeg
Milk	Pineapple	Raspberry
Cottage Cheese	Chinese Cabbage	Walnut
Camembert	Adzuki Beans	Ham
Fresh Bread	Sunflower Seeds	Coriander-
Tomatoes	Black Sesame Seeds	Chilli+
Green Beans	Kidney Bean	Lamb+
Sea Weed		Eel++
Hops		Stilton
Salt		Asparagus-
Wheat		



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How *Flavour* influences the body:

The *salty* flavour:

- influences the kidneys (the *water* element)
- purges and softens lumps
- softens the muscles and glands

Examples of *salty* foods: kelp, seaweed, salt, abalone, chive seeds, clam, crab, cuttlefish, duck, ham, milk, pork, crushed oyster shells.

The *sour* flavour:

- influences the liver (the *wood* element)
- has an astringent action (for loss of body fluids due to sweating or diarrhea).
- for dispersed or weakened energy after a chronic illness, especially hot diseases which lead onto a *yin* deficiency
- activates blood circulation and removes stagnation.

Examples of *sour* foods: lemon, plum, apple, apricot, grape, grapefruit, cumquat, litchi, loquat, mandarin, mango, olive, peach, pineapple, raspberry, adzuki beans, star fruit, strawberry, tomato, vinegar.

(In Japan *sour* foods/nibbles are served at bars to counteract the overly dispersing effect of alcohol. So a martini with an olive represents the perfect *yin yang* balance.)

The *bitter* flavour:

- influences the heart (the *fire* element)
- clears heat
- eliminates damp, drains and dries

Examples of *bitter* foods: apricot kernels, asparagus, bitter melon, wild cucumber, celery, cherry seed, coffee, grapefruit peel, hops, kohlrabi, lettuce, radish leaf vinegar (which is both *sour* and *bitter*), ginseng, pumpkin. Animal bile (extracted from bears' gall bladders) was traditionally used to treat fevers.

The *pungent* flavour:

- Influences the lung (the *metal* element)
- disperses the *yang qi*. ie brings it to the surface and so promotes sweating
- can be used in cases of pathogenic attack with cold or flu like symptoms

Examples of *pungent* foods: Chinese chives, ginger, mustard, chilli, cinnamon twigs and bark, coriander, fennel, dill, green onion, green pepper, marjoram, nutmeg, peppermint, radish, red pepper, rosemary, soybean oil, star anise, sweet basil, tobacco, white pepper, wine.

If eaten to excess, *pungent* foods will deplete *qi*. They tend to be eaten in hot climates where, because of the heat, there is already an excess of *yang*. They are better eaten in summer and to be avoided in winter unless taken medicinally to expel a pathogen.

The *sweet* flavour:

- Influences the spleen (the *earth* element)
- tones, harmonises and moistens in the case of a deficiency
- nourishes the *yin*
- slows acute symptoms and reduces toxic effects
- aligned with the *sweet* flavour is the *bland* or *mild*. This eliminates damp and promotes urination eg Chinese barley or Job's tears. Barley has a similar (but not as pronounced) effect. Chinese barley combined with yam resolves damp by supporting the spleen.

Examples of foods with a *sweet* flavour are: rice, lotus root, yam, potato, abalone, apple, apricot, tofu, beef, beetroots, brown sugar, cabbage, carp, egg, carrot, coconut, figs, dates, lamb, pawpaw, milk, pumpkin, walnuts, tomato, prawns, peach.



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Some foods are described as *fragrant*. This means they can penetrate through damp turbidity and support the spleen, move *qi*, improve stagnation in the stomach and encourage digestion. At the end of a Chinese meal, oranges or mandarins are offered to unblock and move *qi*.

Contraindications or caution

These are some contraindications for particular types of food:

- Because *pungent* foods disperse the blood and *yang qi*, these should be avoided in cases of *yin* deficiency, particularly in the lungs and in liver blood deficiency.
- *salt* where there is oedema due to kidney *yang* deficiency or spleen *yang* deficiency - this is interestingly similar to Western scientific medicine.
- Greasy/oily foods create heat and damp, leading to stagnation of the *qi*. As much as possible, they should be avoided.

The colour of foods indicate, according to the 5 element theory, which organs they influence. For instance, red (skin on) peanuts act on the blood; when skinned they act more on the surface.

Direction of movement

Foods have an energetic tendency to move the *qi* in particular directions:

Direction	Element and Season	Foods	Condition	Flavour
Upward	Wood Spring	Leaves Flowers Wine Apricot Beef Black Fungus	Diarrhea Prolapses	
Outward	Fire Summer	Peppermint Ginger Pepper Cinnamon	Induce perspiration so for fever	Hot Pungent and Sweet
Downward	Metal Autumn	Barley Lettuce Mushroom Tofu Lychee	Vomiting Asthma Hiccups	Sweet Sour
Inward	Water Winter	Banana Seeds		
Balancing	Earth Indian Summer	Rice	Support Digestion	Bland or Sweet

Seasonal Considerations

It is recommended that foods be eaten when in season, with preference given to those which grow in the local area.

Further recommendations:

- in intensely humid weather, use *pungent*, hot food such as garlic, ginger or pepper. By promoting perspiration, these dry out internal damp.
- to combat the cold in winter use *warming* and *yin* nourishing foods such as root vegetables, lamb, pork and soups.
- in summer use *cooling* foods such as mung bean soup to protect the *qi* from damage by the heat. Avoid hot or greasy food where possible.
- spring presents an opportunity to eat less meat and more leafy greens, so this is a good time to loose weight.
- in autumn eat chicken soup and white fungus.



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Application of the Doctrine of Signatures

In this approach, foods resembling an organ or body part will benefit that part of the body. The most obvious example is the use of offal for weakness in the corresponding organ. Chickens' feet benefit the feet and legs (and hence the kidneys). Walnuts resemble the brain, so the kidneys are benefited. Food which becomes gelatinous when cooked is said to benefit the *yin* and the *jing*. Eg shark's fin soup, oxtail soup, jelly fish, beche de mer.

Poor dietary habits

Eating incorrect foods may lead to illness:

- excessive consumption of dry foods [baked and broiled] may cause stomach *yin* deficiency
- excessive consumption of hot foods may cause stomach heat
- excessive consumption of cold foods may cause stomach cold
- overeating may cause stagnation of *qi*
- constant nibbling weakens the stomach *qi*
- undereating leads to malnourishment and spleen and stomach deficiency
- eating late at night damages the stomach *yin*
- for a healthy stomach, eat at regular times to suit the natural flow of the body's *qi*
- eating when worried or sad or anxious may cause stagnation of *qi* in the stomach
- eating while arguing stagnates the *qi*
- eating while reading or watching TV weakens the *qi*
- eating on the run weakens the *qi*.

