

Chapter 17

Diet According to Traditional Chinese Medicine for Health and Longevity



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Abstract Diet nutritional therapy is a primary mode of healing used in Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to prevent and treat disease. While modern medicine has only recently recognized that proper nutrition is foundational to human health, they often fail to understand its therapeutic importance. For centuries, TCM physicians have integrated diet therapies into their healing practices providing a detailed knowledge of the healing power of common foods, including the integration of herbal medicines into dietetics. This chapter addresses the key philosophies underlying Chinese medical dietetics, underscores the importance of a healthy digestive system as the basis of human health, and provides guidance on how foods and botanicals can maintain, restore, and build health and achieve healthy longevity.

Keywords Aging · Lifespan · Food · Diet · Health · Yin-yang

17.1 Introduction

The chapter lays out how to think about and pragmatically adapt one's diet according to TCM to optimize for health and longevity. It first goes through the basic theories of the TCM related to diet, such as understanding food nature and flavor from the theories of the Yin-Yang, the Five Elements and using the meridian and organ theory to explain the pertinence of foods. It then explains the TCM aspects of the digestive system and details of the different body constitution, and allows the reader to self-assess where they stand. Building on those first two parts, it then explains how to regulate one's diet based on one's body constitution, age, gender and according to seasons and geographic location. Finally yet importantly, this chapter shares with the readers some of TCM's best wisdom on diet for health and longevity. For example, providing vivid examples on how to maintain one's brain function while ageing, how to regulate and boost immunity, how to prevent illness, how to tackle common or serious illness and it arises and so on.

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There is a Chinese proverb saying, diet is linked with both the body and soul. Food and medicine share the same roots, which means that foods and daily diet not only provide nutrition and delicious flavors, but also bring energy, happiness, and are important for optimal health. In China, functional nutrition draws on thousands of years of culture, based on TCM, which recognizes that dietary regimens and herbal tonics are a source of healing and defense, can strengthen the body, maintain fitness, prevent and cure illnesses, and contribute greatly to longevity and prosperity. The approach of TCM is, at its core, using nature, alternative-healing methods, tailored to the individual's body and needs. However, people may ask how can one maintain good health, prevent and treat illness, and at the same time enjoy delicious cuisine?

The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine is the earliest existing Chinese medical classic, and the source of Chinese medical theory and herbs. TCM doctors have been applying its theory in hospitals and clinics. The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine states that medicine inhibits illness. Five Chinese traditional grains (rice, red beans, wheat, soybeans, millet) can be used to nourish the body. There are five kinds of fruits (peach, plum, apricot, chestnut, Jujube) which can be used to assist the five kinds of grains to fulfil such functions. The five kinds of livestock (cow, goat, pig, and chicken) can be used to supplement the internal organs. Five kinds of vegetables (sunflowers, leaves of bean, onions, scallion, Chinese chive) can be used to enrich the viscera. When the energy and flavor of foods harmonize, people can strengthen their body essence and increase their Qi (energy) (Yang et al. translation Li and Liu 2005).

Based on the above classic literature, we have learned the following three lessons. First, the choice of daily food ingredients should include a rich variety of grains, vegetables, fruits, and proteins to balance nutrition. Second, foods have their own energy and flavors, suited for different health conditions. Third, balanced energy and flavors of foods have therapeutic effects on the human body, especially strengthening the essence and increasing Qi. TCM find that there is a close relationship between people's spirit and health. Food can nourish the spirit, which influences our health status. TCM widens the spectrum, and creates a link between essence, Qi and spirit with food. Moreover, essence, Qi and spirit have a particularly important impact on human health and longevity.

17.2 TCM Basic Theories Related to Diet

The TCM concept of a healthy diet includes establishing a broad, balanced food base, making food easy to digest and absorb, while also ensuring that the food quantities are suited to each individual, and taking into consideration the climate change and regional differences. TCM finds food affects our daily Yin (interior energy)-Yang (exterior energy) balance. Because foods are categorized as either Yin or Yang in their nature, they can be used as an effective healing method to maintain and re-build equilibrium of body energy.

Building up a healthy diet is a way to attain physical, emotional, and mental wellness. To achieve a healthy balance, one needs to understand TCM concepts of foods and herbs, and healthy diet first.

17.2.1 Understanding of Food Nature from TCM Theories of Yin-Yang

Choosing the foods and herbs that are right for us is essential to achieving and maintaining good health. Daily diet is closely related to the temperature change of the day and the alternation of the mild, cold and hot seasons. Therefore, TCM uses Yin and Yang to define the cold, hot, warmth, and coolness of the four energies of food. Yin and Yang are the two fundamental principles or forces in the universe, ever opposing and supplementing each other. This ancient philosophical concept has become an important component of the basic theory of TCM. In the beginning, Yin and Yang described a location in relation to the sun. A place exposed to the sun is Yang, and a place without exposure is Yin. The southern side of a mountain, for example, is Yang, while its northern side is Yin. Thus the ancient Chinese people, during their everyday life and work, came to understand that all aspects of the natural world could be seen as having a dual aspect. For example: day and night, brightness and dimness, movement and stillness, upward and downward directions, heat and cold, etc. (Zhang et al. 1989).

The terms Yin and Yang express these dual and opposite qualities of food and how to achieve balance. This is an inherent property and not necessarily dependent on the food temperature. Yang food means that its energy creates warmth or heat when taking them. For instance, eating chili warms the body. “Flavor” can also be defined as a Yin and Yang. Yang taste includes pungent, sweet or bland. Yang cooking or preparation methods include stir-frying, stewing, baking, deep-frying, roasting, grilling or barbecue (Leggett 1994). These foods and herbs make our energy rise to the body’s surface.

Yin food means that the energy of foods is cool or cold, and the tastes sour, bitter or salty. Yin cooking or preparation methods include steam or eating raw (Leggett 1994). Yin foods restrain the body’s energy and cause it to descend. Many foods have very mild Yin or Yang qualities therefore defined as “neutral”. Examples of such foods include rice, corn, kale and carrots.

Even if we do not have detailed knowledge about the Yin and Yang of food, if we consume a broad range of foods (rainbow-colored food), we can quite naturally get a balance of Yin and Yang.

17.2.2 *Understanding of Food Flavor from TCM Theories of Five Elements*

Through taste and experience, the wise ancestors not only found the food for human survival, but also found the medical herbs to treat illness. Ancestors discovered the method of determining the action and properties of foods and herbs through tasting and the cold and heat reaction of the human body after eating, and gradually formed a relatively perfect theory of the properties of TCM herbs, based on “four Qi and five flavors”. Because different tastes have different effects on the human body, through the theory of Five Elements, we can better understand the relationship between food flavor and the human body.

In Chinese, the Five Elements are Wu Xing—Wu means five and Xing means movement and change. The Five Elements are wood, fire, earth, metal and water. These elements each have their own special properties, which are at the root of the ancient philosophical concepts used in TCM.

Although the Chinese theory of Five Elements and the Greek theory of Four Elements are different in their history of formation, the rudiments of both belong to the earliest atomic theory. In order to explain the material world around them, ancient philosophers made a generalization and deduction about the respective properties of the substances and their interactive relationships. According to Chinese theory, wood, fire, earth, metal and water are the five basic substances that constitute the material world. They each have their own specific properties, but they also have interactive generation and restriction functions, and are in a constant state of motion and change (Zhang et al. 1989).

Five Elements theory believes that food has different colors and bring varied tastes. Tastes have certain effects on the body as described below.

Sour: Such as hawthorn, lemon and dried dark plum. This taste helps with digestive absorption, resisting fatty foods and preventing indigestion. It generates fluids and Yin, and stops discharge, perspiration, chronic cough and diarrhea. It also has an astringent effect on emissions, including sperm and frequent urination. It helps our body consolidate essential substances, preventing them from escaping. Sour foods can also bring disordered Qi back to normal. Modern research shows sour flavors to be generally cleansing and detoxifying. However, we have to limit intake when ulcer or stones are present.

Bitter: Such as aloe vera and green tea. This taste clears away heat and dries dampness. It can control abnormally ascending Qi and purge any pathogenic fire effect. In certain combinations, it can also improve the body’s Yin. Bitter foods can be used to treat most cases of excess and acute damp-heat or heat-fire. These foods should be limited if a weakness of Qi and Blood is present.

Sweet: Such as jujube and honey. Serving to nourish, moisten, moderate and invigorate the body, sweet foods can also regulate Qi, Blood and function of the viscera. They strengthen deficiency syndrome and alleviate dryness. Sweet foods work in coordination with the spleen and stomach. They can help relieve pain and spasms,

and reduce cough, ulcer and constipation. An excess of sweets should be avoided when suffering from damp, phlegm and water retention conditions.

Spicy (Pungent): Such as ginger, Sichuan pepper and clove. This taste disperses and promotes movement of Qi and Blood circulation. It stimulates digestion and helps break through blockage. It treats syndromes of the exterior, and expels stagnation of Qi, Blood and pathogens. Spicy foods must be used carefully as many people cannot tolerate them.

Salty: Such as marine algae and kelp. These foods can promote moisture and have a softening effect. In particular, these foods regulate the moisture balance flow downwards in the body. They also move Qi downward, increase urine and bowel movements, and are used to treat constipation and swelling. They promote the action of the kidney system, allowing beneficial foods to be fully absorbed and functional, and improving concentration. Salty foods soften nodes and masses, and disperse accumulations in hardening muscles and glands.

Bland: Such as dolichos seed and pearl barley. This taste promotes urination and treats edema.

17.2.3 Using Meridian and Organ Theory to Explain the Pertinence of Food

Over its long history, Chinese medicine has come to realize that different foods enter specific meridian pathways, directing their effect towards particular organs, that is to say knowledge of the metabolic trend of food in the human body. This information directs the therapeutic use of the food (Zhang et al. 1989). When we know which meridian or organ a food will target, this is useful in treating a disorder of that particular meridian or organ. For instance, onion enters the lung meridian and lung, while lychee targets the liver meridian and liver. Peppers affect the stomach meridian and stomach; sunflower seeds, the spleen meridian and spleen; kidney beans, naturally, the kidney meridian and kidney; and coffee, the heart and its meridian.

17.3 TCM Aspects of the Digestive System and Body Constitution

Over thousands of years TCM has accumulated knowledge about using foods and herbs therapeutically, providing natural and alternative way to boost energy and immunity, regulate one's mood, enhance one's beauty, reduce toxins and treat other health conditions, externally and internally. TCM believes that the human body is made up of five systems. These five systems are related to the digestion and absorption

of food, the transportation and metabolism of nutrients. In this paper, we focus on the structure and function of the digestive system and body constitution.

17.3.1 Understanding the Digestive System

“We are what we eat” was a popular saying in the 1990’s, although it is only partially true. “We are what we eat and absorb” would be a better expression of the facts. What we absorb is dependent upon how healthy our spleen system is. According to Chinese medical theory, the spleen is the “Agricultural Bureau” of the body, controlling where energy “seeds” are planted and how the health of the body is harvested. The spleen is the post-natal base of life, the source of acquired constitution. This means that once all the congenital factors of the body have been determined, one’s health development relies on the spleen to do the rest of the work. The spleen directs digestion and absorption, governs Blood flow within the vessels. Therefore, the spleen system is considered the “source of Qi and Blood.” In TCM, the spleen and stomach make up the digestive system, which includes the pancreas, small intestine, and part of the stomach functions. It is related to digestion, water metabolism, and hemopoiesis in modern medicine. Below we provide a self-assessment for people to understand the digestive system.

Questions Relating to the Spleen System (Zhang 2016).

A Do you have severe food allergies or do you get food poisoning more than twice a year?

yes no

B Do you have sensitivities to certain foods?

yes no

C Do you often get bloated after eating?

yes no

D Do you have heartburn?

yes no

E Do you often have diarrhea?

yes no

F Do you frequently have bad breath?

yes no

G Do you often have an upset stomach or nausea?

yes no

H Do you bruise easily?

yes no

I Do you dislike the wet season or damp weather?

yes no

J Do you have muscle problems (weakness, tightness, stiffness, knots, muscle tears)

yes no

If the number of yes responses is 4 or more, one's digestive system is relatively weak, and cannot tolerate excessively cold, hot, acid and heavy food. These people need to adjust their digestive system. By contrast, if the number of yes responses is less than 4, these people merely need to maintain a healthy diet.

17.3.2 Understanding Body Constitution

Body constitution comprises our physical state, including the morphology, function of our internal systems, and metabolism, along with our mental and spiritual states. As we pass through life, everyone's physical constitution goes through periods of relative balance and imbalance, for example, passing from hot to cold or strong to weak. An imbalance of our physical constitution can mark a transitional stage, when we are shifting away from health towards disorder, but before disease develops. Therefore, maintaining balance in our physical constitution can prevent or lessen disease and promote recovery from illness. TCM strives to balance the physical constitution, mitigate shock from the outside environment, and dissolve toxic substances within the body.

The features of one's constitution can be detected in three areas: the physical build of the person, the body's internal functions, and the psychological state. It also depends on the stage of life the person is in, such as puberty or menopause.

The constitution has two origins: congenital natural disposition and post-natal lifestyle (i.e. nature and nurture). Many factors influence the formation of the constitution, such as the parents' health, physically and mentally, the time of conception, and the mother's condition during pregnancy. These are all part of the congenital natural disposition of one's constitution. However, most of the influence comes from our own actions and lifestyle. We care more about how each person's digestive system operates, in order to cooperate best with a good choice of foods.

Below we have provided a self-assessment for people to learn more about cold and hot, weakness and overly strong, neutral and mixes of body constitution.

Questions Relating to Temperature: Neutral, Cold, Hot or Mixes Constitution (Zhang and Yao 2012).

1) Are you sensitive to cold or heat?

normal (1)

sensitive to cold (2)

sensitive to heat (3)

2) What do you prefer to drink?

depends on season (1)

warm/hot drinks (2)

cold drinks (3)

3) Do you sweat a lot?

normal (1)

less than average (2)

more than average (3)

- 4) How do you classify your thirst?
- normal (1)
 - not often thirsty (2)
 - often thirsty (3)
- 5) How is your complexion?
- shining and rosy (1)
 - pale and puffy (2)
 - flushed (3)
- 6) Which season do you prefer?
- average (1)
 - prefer summer (2)
 - prefer winter (3)
- 7) What is your pulse rate (beats per minute)?
- from 60 to 80 (1)
 - less than 60 (2)
 - over 80 (3)
- 8) Do you like tea or coffee?
- up to two cups of coffee or tea everyday (1)
 - three or more cups of tea everyday (2)
 - three or more cups of coffee everyday (3)
- 9) What kind of food do you prefer?
- depends on season (1)
 - a light taste or raw food (2)
 - spicy or strongly flavored (3)



Assessment:

Cold or hot

Neutral: 6 or more responses of (1)

Cold: 6 or more of (2)

Hot: 6 or more of (3)

Mixes: if fewer than 6 of any one response

Questions Relating to Humidity: Neutral, Damp, Dry or Mixes Constitution

1) Do you enjoy a rainy or dry environment?

normal (1)

dry (2)

raining (3)

2) What kind of taste do you usually have in your mouth?

normal (1)

sticky and sweet (2)

dry or bitter (3)

3) What is your skin condition?

normal or mixed (1)

oily (2)

dry or cracking (3)

4) How would you characterize your excretion? (discharge from eyes, ears and skin; for women, include monthly period).

comfortable amount (1)

quite a lot (2)

scant or absent (3)

5) Do you smoke or drink alcohol?

occasionally (1)

frequently (2)

refrain from both (3)

6) What is your tolerance for dairy products?

average (1)

less than average (2)

more than average (3)

7) How do you feel in general?

happy and relaxed (1)

heavy, sleepy; fullness of chest and stomach (2)

irritable, anxious; dry lips and throat (3)

8) How would you characterize your bowel movements and urine output?

normal (1)

loose stool or turbid urine (2)

dry stool, constipation or scanty urine (3)

9) How would you describe your build?

average (1)

heavy build (2)

slim (3)

Assessment:



Damp or dry

Neutral: 6 or more responses of (1)

Damp: 6 or more of (2)

Dry: 6 or more of (3)

Mixes: if fewer than 6 of any one response.

Questions Regarding Your Response to Adversity: Neutral, Weak, Overly Strong or Mixes Constitution.

1) Do you feel energetic?

average (1)

more than average (2)

less than average (3)

2) What is your tongue like when you get up in the morning?

pink body and thin fur (1)

dark or purple body and thick fur (2)

pale or deeper red body and no fur (3)

3) What kind of food do you prefer?

mixes, with more vegetables and less meat (1)

mostly meat (2)

vegetarian (3)

4) How often is your elimination?

normal (1)

infrequent (2)

too frequent (3)

5) How often do you get a cold every year?

once or a few times (1)

never (2)

often (3)

6) How often do you get excited?

normal (1)

frequently (2)

seldom (3)

7) How do your muscles feel?

normal (1)

tight and sore (2)

soft and weak (3)

8) How quickly do you feel shortness of breath when hiking?

15 min to half an hour (1)

more than half an hour (2)

after a few minutes (3)

9) How does your head often feel?

normal (1)

pressure or sharp headache (2)

lightheaded or dizziness (3)

Assessment:



Weak or overly strong

Neutral: 6 or more responses of (1)

Weak: 6 or more of (3)

Overly Strong: 6 or more of (2)

Mixes: if fewer than 6 of any one response.

In completing the above self-assessment, we encounter some pairs of concepts: cold or hot, damp or dry, weak or overly strong. All of these values in a medial range are normal. It is normal to feel cold in the winter and hot in the summer. However, if one always feel cold even in warm seasons, then should seek the underlying reasons and try some food remedies. The approach toward damp and dry is similar to cold and hot. People feel wet in humid season and dehydrated in the dry season. These feelings are normal within boundaries. Dampness nourishes our inside and moistens the surface of skin while dryness limits the growth of mold. However, too much dampness makes skin oily and develop acne. In contrast, too much dryness causes skin to wrinkle and crack. Therefore, it is best to maintain a neutral status.

After an assessment of body constitution, one can choose the right foods and herbs to achieve and maintain a healthy balance. Let us take damp, dry and neutral constitutions as examples. Neutral type means that one is in healthy balance. In order to maintain this state, this person should eat a broad range of foods, and drink water according to the climate and level of perspiration. However, if one has a damp constitution, too much wet is carried inside. One has to add specific foods to the diet (such as pearl barley, azuki beans, corn) to reduce dampness. As for the dry type, one should take foods such as lily bulb, Chinese wolfberry, honey or lemon to nourish and moisten the body.

17.4 How to Match Diet with Body Variety and Avoid Blight

Chinese dietary therapy (shiliao) applies foods and herbs to achieve health promotion, prevention and treating diseases, rehabilitation, and healing from diseases.

When applying food and diet for those purposes we need to think of the points below.

17.4.1 Food According to Constitution, Age and Sex

Food and dietary recommendations by TCM theory are usually made according to the person's individual constitution and condition.

It is important to ensure that people's diet are aligned with their personal nature. People with a Yang constitution are usually by nature more active and forceful. They do not tolerate heat well, so in the warmer summer months, they must eat more Yin foods and reduce their intake of hot or spicy foods. The more gentle nature of these Yin foods will bring one's Yang nature into balance. By contrast, those with a Yin constitution are often quieter and less energetic. They have a low tolerance for cold, so should consume more Yang foods, which are warm or hot, and should add spice to boost their energy.

Two women with the same illness and same age group can have completely different food therapies because their constitutions are opposite. For treating migraine, a person feeling hot, sharp pains, a flushed face, and frequent perspiration, should use chamomile due to its cooling and bitter qualities and its ability to target the liver meridian. A person with a splitting headache on the top of head or the whole head, spreading over the eyes and temple areas, feeling cold from their body to their head, induced by cold and rain, and likes pressure and warmth, needs to utilize dry ginger, and angelica dahurica which are warm, hot and spicy. A student of mine applies dietary therapy to treat more than 60 women suffering from migraines with over 80% experiencing positive results.

Children, adults and seniors may not use the same ingredients or the same dosage to treat a symptom because their constitutions are different. From the age of 24 to 35, people should focus on preventative measures. They should do all things in moderation (for example, food consumption or working hours), and keep a balanced emotional state. For this group it is best to choose more ingredients that are neutral. From the age of 36 to 65, people should focus on preventing chronic and more serious illnesses, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood sugar. It is important to take notice of any hereditary diseases and take extra steps toward prevention. This age group should also be sure to consume foods that contain Qi tonics and nourish Blood and body fluids.

At the age of 66 and above, health care should focus on harmonizing the organ systems. Special attention should be given to the digestive, circulatory, cardiovascular and metabolic systems, regardless of whether or not they suffer from ailments. In the younger age group, people may tend to consume a great deal of fruits or vegetables as a main source of fiber. In China, people over the age of 80 do not consume much fruit during the winter months. Their source of fiber will be more from root vegetables, like potatoes, yam, sweet potatoes and taro, as this is better for their digestive system. This traces back to the famous Dr. Chen from the Song dynasty (960–1279 AD), who encouraged elderly people to eat foods that are warm, cooked and soft, and to avoid foods that are glutinous, hardened, raw or cold, because elderly people have weaker Blood and essence, and their digestive system function decreases.

Many healthy longevity people that I interviewed, believe that people over 90 should always eat a highly digestible, low fat, low calorie, low sugar, vitamin rich diet with plenty of dietary fiber, and eat more vegetable oil. They should avoid eating a lot of greasy or fatty food, and only occasionally eat deep-fried, preserved, and overly spicy, salty, or sweet foods. They should also eat 20 percent less and chew their food well before swallowing.

Although the above rules apply generally, because women and men have different body constitutions, their health care can also be different. Since women have changes such as menstruation, pregnancy and post-partum in their life (Zhang 1990), they often need special foods to provide balance. For instance, Chinese angelica is used much more for women. As for men, they have prostate glands and different reproductive structures than women, and they produce sperm and have regular ejaculation. Chinese chive seed is used mostly for men in regulating these functions.

17.4.2 Considering Season and Locality

It is important to match one's diet to the season and personal nature. In the broadest terms, this involves eating Yang foods to warm and energize the body during the winter, then eating calming Yin foods to cool the body and reduce heat in the summer.

Be sure to select seasonal produce to get the most nutrients and health benefits. For instance, some fruits that are seasonal in the summer can assist with cooling the body. Due to globalization and technological advancements in agriculture, some food items formerly available only during the summer may now be purchased year-round. However, this disrupts the natural way and is not conducive to promoting health. Moreover, people should keep their local environment in mind. If one lives in an area that is hot and humid, they need to focus on consuming foods that can help reduce water retention and cool.

Human physical and emotional status is greatly influenced by climate and the environment, its rhythm and seasons. When applying foods to assist human health, one should eat less cold food in the winter, less hot food in the summer, less spicy and pungent food in the autumn dry season and less heavy and oily food in humid environments.

Geographical features of a place have a strong impact on both body constitution and food choices. People from the north can take more hot food than people who have grown up in the south. People from humid regions can tolerate wet climates better than people from dry regions.

In order to get the best quality of ingredients one should select foods that are still produced in the area from which they traditionally originate. For instance, the best quality wolfberries come from Ningxia and Gansu provinces in China. The best jujubes (red dates) are from Hebei and Shandong province.

However, this theory is just a general guidance, and when people become ill (or unbalanced), certain routine foods must not be eaten or eaten less quantity while eating alternative sorts of food until they recover from imbalance. Generally speaking,

warm and hot therapeutic foods, such as ginger, fennel, jujube and walnut have the function of warming the interior, dispelling cold and assisting Yang, and can be used to harmonize cold constitutions, treat cold and Yin syndromes (weakness and dampness). The cool and cold nature of therapeutic foods, such as mung beans, watermelon, pear and chrysanthemum, have the function of clearing heat, purging fire, cooling blood and detoxifying, and can be used to harmonize hot constitutions, and treat heat and Yang syndromes (excess and hot-dryness).

17.4.3 Avoiding Certain Foods

Some foods can be harmful or cause illness. In some people or under certain conditions, foods can cause acute or immediate reactions and problems. Examples include allergies, food poisoning, symptoms related to lactose intolerance, etc. Timing and amount of food consumption can also negatively impact the digestive system, such as prolonged hunger or long periods between meals, or eating and drinking too much at one meal (Zhang et al. 1990). Over-eating one type of food also has a negative effect. An example is a person who exercises regularly and eats healthy in every way, including a heavily vegetable-based diet, except eats a large quantity of dark chocolate every day and then later diagnosed with high cholesterol. Over the long-term, food consumption can even help in negating inherited disorders. The Chinese saying “illness comes from mouth” (bingcongkouru 病从口入) is still true for many diseases. Heart diseases, a fatty liver, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and weight gain very much have to do with our food intake. If we can reduce certain foods in the early stages of those illnesses, we can really take control of the condition and eventually return to a healthy state.

Another way that food can harm is when people eat foods that don't agree with their body. As we know, TCM believes that individual bodies may be more inclined to “hot” or “cold” constitutions. Those who are on the hot side may experience more constipation, heartburn or mouth ulcers. If this is the case, they should avoid foods that raise the heat in the body, such as spicy foods, coffee or hot soups. By contrast, people who are in the cold spectrum may have an upset stomach from drinking too many cold drinks, eating cold natured food like persimmon, eating ice cream, and so on, and therefore should avoid raw foods or other cold foods that make them feel ill, even if they enjoy the flavor.

To avoid excess in eating certain types of foods, one should be mindful of flavor preference or aversion. Continually eating from only one flavor group can negatively impact various organs. For example, eating only spicy foods can make you sweat too much and reduce water content in the body, making the lung body fluid dry out, it also scatters Qi, people should avoid spicy foods when suffering Qi weakness. Likewise, too much salt can negatively impact the kidney as they struggle to filter properly. People who eat too many sweet things, such as cookies or anything with added sugar, will often face problems with their pancreas from over stimulation, too much insulin production and may cause muscle weakness and put on weight.

Undigested food becoming stagnant in the digestive tract can lead to chronic ailments. This may happen if food is not digested thoroughly the first time, if it is not passed in a timely manner, or if particles become stuck in the intestines. Signs that food has accumulated in the digestive tract may include poor appetite, belching or gas with a distinct smell, bloating or diarrhea, and in severe cases, painful heartburn with a bitter taste in the throat and mouth. When not resolved, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), pancreatitis and gallstones are likely to occur; polyps can also develop in the colon, leading to colon cancer.

17.5 Diet for Boosting Healthy Life and Longevity

Following the discussion about the TCM concepts and theory in Sects. 17.1, 17.2 and 17.3, this section provides some recommendations for memories, immunity and longevity by introducing some diet and recipes.

Foods and herbs have specific therapeutic actions beyond their temperature, taste, and the meridians traveled. Food may either strengthen a particular substance or function (Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang), or reduce and regulate the influence of a pathological condition (Qi or Blood stagnation, dampness, heat or cold). Lychee, for example, reduces cold and regulates Blood circulation and therefore can treat pigmentation on the face; kidney beans can enhance Yang.

Chinese herbal diet (yaoshan) refers to a diet remedy made up of foods and herbs with therapeutic effects. Specifically, the herbal diet recipes can be either in the form of original food, or processed and mixed from food and herbal materials (Zhang et al. 1993). According to the form and processing method of recipes, a herbal diet can be divided into the following two categories. Type 1 is liquid form, such as juice or smoothies obtained from freshly squeezed food. It can also be porridge, tea, soup and paste formed by boiling, and steam. Type 2 is solid form, such as pancake and steamed bread.

There are two principles that dictate how to pair foods and herbs. One focuses on matching two foods that have a similar function of Yin or Yang. These form natural and regular pairings, just like the way you might pair red meat with red wine. In TCM, an example would be ginger with brown sugar, or silver fungus with honey or crystal sugar. The second principle is to pair foods that have differing but complimentary effects on the body. This may involve tonifying/strengthening Qi or Blood through Yin and Yang properties for the most effective balance. For example, taking ginger (which strengthens Yang) and dates (to tonify Blood) works to strengthen the body overall.

17.5.1 Maintaining Brain Function During Aging

Aging is an unavoidable phenomenon. It is characterized by both internal and external changes. On the physical side, there is a decline in physical ability, weakening of the function of the sense organs, and onset of disorders like cardiac problems, diabetes, and blood pressure changes. There are also changes mentally, there may be memory loss or a decrease in mental and logical sharpness.

It is impossible to stay young forever. However, by regulating eating and lifestyle, one can maintain optimal health. Changing diet cannot only extend life, but it also will make one feel and look younger than their actual age. Both physical and mental body could improve through foods and diet. Strengthening Qi, Yang and nourishing Blood can keep one young mentally, maintaining concentration and a sharp mind. Toward this end, one could often take ginseng, astragalus root, walnuts, pistachios, chestnuts, raspberries, cassia fruits, black sesame seeds, cherries, angelica root, coconuts, cinnamon powder, ginkgo nuts, rosemary, saffron crocus, pumpkin seeds, wolfberries, longan fruit, schisandra berries and pu'er tea.

17.5.2 Regulating and Boosting Immunity

If the immune system is depressed or overly sensitive, it becomes prone to numerous diseases, ranging from the common cold to cancer. The onset of respiratory infection tends to be higher when combined with a sensitive or weakened immune system; in the long-term this can lead to auto-immune and allergy-originating diseases. TCM believes that the lung, the spleen and the kidney Qi is our body's defense, preventing illness from invading deep into body. To strengthen the Qi, and ultimately overall immunity, one should eat healthy foods, and make simple dietary changes to balance all the functions. In doing so, we can prevent some respiratory illnesses and the onset of allergies. Toward this end, one could often take ginseng, astragalus root, fig, ginger, licorice, garlic, jujubes, lotus seeds, marine algae, sea buckthorn, silver ear, onion, lingzhi (reishi) and shiitake mushroom, and five leaf gynostemma herb.

17.5.3 Achieving Healthy Longevity

Throughout China's history, the combination of health foods and diet therapy has been used to achieve the goal of healthy longevity. According to my interviews with more than 80 elderly people over the age of 70, and reviewing more than 2000 of my own clinical documents, in addition to some literature. I have concluded that food ingredients and diet patterns are closely related to health and longevity, which is reflected in two aspects of health preservation and outcome of my clinical treatments.

17.5.3.1 Diet Therapy for Illness Prevention

Through the proper choice of foods and herbs one can live a balanced, healthy life, and avoid illness. This highlights the preventative side of TCM, which should be appealing to all: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

In southern China, most people start to pay attention to health preservation and choose special diet in their 40 to 50s. People in this age group clearly feel a certain level of body and mental functions deterioration, and often have disorders in their nutrient absorption and organ functions. This health transition will affect people's work performance, and ultimately their quality of life. In the past one can eat whichever food he prefers, of any quantity at any time of day, or likewise consume only one meal per day, or even fast for three to five days. Once one has reached middle age, one would feel dizzy, sweaty and unable to work if one skips a meal; drinking alcohol would cause a headache and heart palpitations; and eating spicy food may lead to a stomachache and diarrhea. Some people seek the advice of TCM doctor, to identify their body constitutions, and the functional status of the digestive system and to get recommendations for suitable food and diets. Their bodily functions may restore to normal in a few months after taking professional advices and a food remedies. Some of them get even more benefits after taking systematic measures, for instance, eating small portion of meals up to four or five times each day (applicable to people with weak spleen and stomach), eating cold food only in warm weather (for people with cold constitution, choose cooked food, warm food in winter), and following the seasonal changes to adjust diets. Undertaking such methods for several years, people could reduce the incidence of respiratory and digestive system illness. Other common symptoms are hot flashes, sweating, insomnia and losing temper easily in the age group between 50 and 60s, which is a result of declining human hormone levels. However, if people maintain a healthy diet these symptoms can be reduced or disappear, therefore benefit the quality of life for advance age.

For those who would like to apply food therapy before reaching the middle age, they could think of the two aspects presented below.

(1) Methods of healthcare and prevention based on previous medical experience and weaknesses.

From people's history of illness, doctors can detect the varied weakness in each patient. For example, when contracting a cold or flu, the disease may affect the nose and sinuses in one patient, but affect the stomach and appetite in another. If cold always affects one's nose and sinuses, their lung Qi needs to be strengthened. If a patient does not suffer from colds frequently, their condition is normal; but if a patient catches cold 4 to 5 times a year or chronically, they must pay attention to it. To strengthen lung and prevent illness, people can eat almonds, pears, lotus roots, or lotus seeds.

If cold or stress always affects one's stomach, causing symptoms such as stomachache, bloating, and diarrhea, the stomach and spleen function needs to be strengthened. Patients can eat ginger, whole grains such as glutinous rice, buckwheat, congee, or oats, root vegetables such as yams, or beans like lentils.

(2) Methods of healthcare and prevention based on family history.

If patient has a family history of a certain condition, one can take measures to prevent the same condition occurring in his or her lifetime. Family history is a good indicator of potential health issues, so people should look to their parents and grandparents (or even immediate relatives) to identify potential weak areas. If a patient has a family history of joint problems, such as the hip or toe joints, or the development of osteoporosis (during menopause), they must tonify the kidney system. Some preventative methods for joint problems are delaying menopause by tonifying the kidney and related organ systems with food (starting from the age of around 42 or 45). For example, one can eat more chestnuts, mulberry, hazel, sour jujube, and drink herbal wine from time to time. If patient has a family history of allergic rhinitis and asthma, they must tonify the lung system and related organ systems with food. For example, one can eat more fresh and dried ginger, almonds, juicy pear and ginkgo nut to maintain a good function of the lung.

Regulating the diet, especially using tonics in autumn and winter, is one of the dietary traditions in China, through by which people can cope with winter cold and emergencies as well as maintain health. Those who take tonics in autumn and winter can also prevent common diseases, such as by enhancing the lung and kidney respiratory functions, support heart function, and optimize health of the individual to prevent flu, bronchitis, asthma and arrhythmia.

Enhancing spleen (stomach) and kidney system are most effective for healthy longevity. The classic works of Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine holds that the key factor in the internal causes of human aging is the degeneration of vitality in the kidney system. If one can maintain the function and adjust the balance of Yin and Yang in the kidney system, will be effective in delaying aging.

The kidney system (a broad TCM definition including development, spine, marrow, bladder) is the administrative organ with the greatest power. The kidney system is the congenital base of life and stores essence. The kidney system acts as the strength and intelligence of the entire body, and is responsible for its overall body constitution. It is a storage facility for good essence, and it governs the growth and development of the body as well as the maturation of the reproductive systems. It is the congenital base of life, roots of Yin–Yang energy, and grows partly based on heritage. People's health management influence the kidney's overall status (Zhang 2010).

The kidney system of TCM is related to modern medicine functions including reproduction endocrine, bones, brain, and spinal nerves, etc. If someone regulates the function of the kidney system, can maintain concentration and a good memory, it would be beneficial to the quality of sleeping, healthy bones and hearing, and prevent early Alzheimer's disease and renal hypertension.

In TCM, the spleen system and stomach system are the roots of the acquired constitution, the source of Qi and Blood. The digestive system, represented by the spleen and stomach includes the function of the pancreas of modern medicine, which is related to endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases with high clinical morbidity and mortality, such as diabetes, fatty liver, and obesity.

Once people reach middle age, they start to feel that skipping breakfast or eating too fast affects their physical and mental condition throughout the day. Generally,

breakfast should be rich in variety and nutritious, as the entire day's store of Yang energy and one's mental energy is dependent on the various nutrients absorbed in the morning. Lunch should also include sufficient nutritious food, since it maintains people's energy in the afternoon and evening. Dinner may be simple, since eating foods that are hard to digest or overeating can affect sleep.

Research on intestinal microbes in recent years has revealed that the balance status of intestinal flora will influence the central nervous system, reproductive system, endocrine and nutrient metabolism (people's tolerance of food, waste excretion). These studies have shown that human behaviors, emotions, personality characteristics and cognitive abilities are not only regulated by the brain, but also affected by the gut-brain axis; not only by their brain nerves, but also by intestinal microbes. Human pain perception and pain responses, emotions, and cognitive abilities are closely related to intestinal microbes (Collen 2015). TCM believes that the structure and function of the intestine are related to the major systems of the spleen, the liver and the kidney. In other words, whether the microbes are balanced depends on whether people can correctly choose healthy food to prevent food poisoning. The five organ systems defined by TCM also have effects on the digestive function of synergy.

Appetite is one of the key signs of human health. The quality of appetite is not only related to the activities of the digestive system, but also to people's overall physiological function. Many diseases can cause changes in appetite. Actually abnormal appetite is the first symptom of the disease in clinic. Doctors often say that those patients who have a good appetite should recover easily from illness. Another sign of status of normal digestion is bowel movement conditions. For middle-aged and elderly people, a slightly soft stool is better than constipation. People with constipation, such as excessive force during defecation, may induce heart disease. To treat constipation with diet therapies would work. Healthy people can eat vegetables that are more cruciferous. Those with conditions of less teeth, weak spleen energy and stomach dysfunction, can choose root vegetables with short and soft fibers, such as yam, sweet potato, potato, taro, etc. The methods of cooking could be steaming, making soup; cutting vegetables into small pieces to mix with rice, a pancake or a smoothie with turnips, greens, beans, celery vegetables. TCM doctors often recommend that patients with constipation should have hemp seeds, almonds, honey, sesame seeds, and pine nuts.

17.5.3.2 Diet Therapy for Treating Serious Diseases

This section introduces some methods and principles for diet therapy using the example of the top four mortality rates in Shanghai, namely cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, tumors, respiratory diseases, endocrine nutrition and metabolic diseases. Many people suffer from hypertension, hyperlipidemia, heart and brain ischemia, tumors, allergic asthma, insulin resistance, diabetes before they pay attention to health diet. At this stage, TCM doctors prescribe foods and herbs according to the severity of diseases. In the acute stage, doctors diagnose the type of disease and work out the best treatments as soon as possible, supplemented by food therapy.

Patients in recovery stage can accelerate the pace if they can apply both medical treatments and food therapy. For some patients who have to take long-term or life-time medication such as type 1 and type 2 diabetes, they can introduce diet and herbs as a complimentary remedy to slow the progression of the disease and prevent complications. In the early stage of hypertension without family history, patients can try to replace some medicines with foods and herbs, and postpone the time required for chemical intervention.

17.5.3.3 Diet Therapy for Treating Common Diseases

There are six groups of commonly used foods and herbs of which can protect one from sickness and prolong life. Doctors can apply their functions based on the TCM perspective. The following six categories of foods are classified according to the food property of neutral, cool and warm. Neutral foods are moderate and can be taken daily or weekly for everyone. Cool effect foods are applied to balance hot condition, and warm effect foods to cold condition. (Table 17.1).

(1) Nuts and Seeds

Nuts and seeds are the essence of plants, providing abundant antioxidants and anti-inflammatory elements to people because they are rich in nutrients and contain large amounts of protein, trace elements, and vitamins.

Peanuts are prominent longevity food. Chinese medicine proposes that most nuts and seeds are neutral or warm in temperature. They supply Qi and Blood, strengthen Yin and Yang, moisturize the skin, quench thirst, moisten dryness, remove annoyance, relieve asthma, and reverse Qi reflux. This food remedy is suitable for one who shows signs of has an early onset of aging, and night and frequent urination, fatigue, dizzy spells, dry throat and mouth, dry cough, dry or peeling skin, dry itching, constipation and other similar symptoms.

Those patients who have symptoms of excessive phlegm and congestions, who easily feel hot and sweaty or who are Yin-Yang balanced should eat less nuts and seeds or eat cautiously.

Since most nuts and seeds contain a higher portion of fat, high oil content, easily oxidable, people eat too much of nuts leading to weight gain. It is advisable to consume moderate amounts of nuts and seeds, preferably 20 to 30 g per day.

(2) Fruits

Fruits are rich in beta-carotene and vitamin c, the key antioxidants that help people absorb special enzymes, reduce blood cholesterol levels, and lower the risk of hypertension.

However, fruits are high in sugar and acid. People should not take them as staple foods. Fruits with higher medicinal value can be used both as food and herbs, likewise lemon, cranberries, apples, mulberries, raspberries, pomegranate, schisandra berries, longan fruit, hawthorn, wolfberries, and fresh jujube. Many fruits are often used in their dried form such as lemon, mulberries, raspberries, schisandra berries, longan fruit, hawthorn, wolfberries and jujube. Fruits can

Table 17.1 Property of six groups of foods (Dou 1981; Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese medicine 2006; Tang 2004)

	Neutral	Cool	Warm
Nuts and Seeds	Hazel		Walnut
	Almond		Aniseed
	Sesame		Pine nut
	Flaxseed		Chestnut
	Pumpkin seed		Coconut milk
	Sunflower seed		
	Peanut		
Fruits	Cranberry	Lemon	Raspberry
	Wolfberry	Apple	Pomegranate
	^a Fresh jujube	Mulberry	Schisandra berry
			Longan fruit
		Hawthorn, ^a dry jujube	
Allium			Garlic
			Garlic/green chive
			Spring onion
			/Onion
			Coriander (cilantro)
Bean products Bean sprouts Fermented food	Yellow, black soybean	Tofu Pu'er tea Green tea Mung bean ^a Azuki bean, black bean sauce	Vinegar
	Green soybean		
	Soymilk		
	^a Azuki bean		
	^a Black bean sauce		
Whole grains	Corn	Wheat	^a Oats
	^a Sweet potato	Barley	Glutinous rice
	Rye	Millet	^a Sweet potato
	^a Oats	Buckwheat	
Algae cruciferous vegetables	^a Radish seed	Nori Kelp Marine algae Wakame Bok choy Shepherd's purse ^a Radish	Mustard Mustard seed
	Chinese cabbage		
	Cabbage		

^aDue to differences in origin and production process, there are two temperature possibilities

increase organ functions, stabilize emotions, regulate Yin and Yang, tonify Qi, and nourish the Blood. Those patients who experience dizziness, infertility, early onset of aging, and night and frequent urination can choose the fruit family. They eat the raw and fresh fruits in harvest or in the warm season and the cooked or dried fruits in the other seasons or in cold weather. When their digestive functions are back to normal, patients can eat raw and fresh fruits; while the function weak, eat cooked or dried fruits.

The phrase “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” is a folk proverb that emphasizes the apple’s comprehensive conditioning and capabilities of health care. Eating apples on a regular basis not only increases nutrition of the heart and the lung by cooling their heat, but also has a positive impact on aiding digestion. Because apples have both strengthening and regulating functions, they nourish body fluids and remove summer heat, and help relieve restlessness, thirst and irritability. As apples benefit the stomach, they help drinkers sober up from alcohol. Apples have been used to treat lack of appetite, dry mouth, poor digestion, diarrhea and bloating in the abdomen after overeating or overdrinking alcohol.

(3) Allium

Allium plants are also taken as vegetables and condiments, and are particularly effective for the balance of probiotics in the body. Garlic, chives, spring onion, onions, and coriander (cilantro) all contain dietary fibers and organosulfur compounds, can kill viruses and therefore limit fungal infection.

TCM thinks that allium plants are warm in nature and spicy in taste, and can stimulate the body’s Qi, Blood, and Yang, increase functions of the kidney, the liver, the heart, the lung and the digestive system, help body Qi movement and Blood circulation, and open the pores and nasal orifices. Spring onion, garlic green chives are commonly eaten daily.

Spring onion has the function of improving immunity on the body surface and regulates the opening and closing of sweat pores. Spring onion is useful for treating cold and flu, and inhibiting the onset of water retention above the chest, as well as relieving cold abdominal pain. This plant also has the function of detoxifying. Spring onion removes irritants from mosquito bites, and prevents constipation and reduced urine. Doctors also apply spring onion to treat light symptom of dysentery and acne.

Garlic warms the digestive system and moves body Qi. It treats food retention, cold sensations pain in the abdomen, and diarrhea. Garlic detoxifies, kills parasites, and inhibits the flu virus, tuberculosis, dysentery and vaginal discharge. It also helps reduce swelling and edema. Garlic juice can be applied topically on the affected area to treat fungal infection of hands, and itchiness, due to athlete’s foot. We can eat raw or cooked garlic. Garlic leaves and garlic oil are alternatives for those who dislike garlic.

Chinese medicine suggests that onions have the effects of strengthening the stomach and regulating the movement of Qi, detoxifying insect bites, and killing insects. It is commonly used for treating hyperlipidemia, poor appetite, abdominal bloating, trauma ulcers, and trichomonas vaginitis in China.

Green chives (garlic chives) warm and tonify the liver and the kidney, reinforce Yang energy, strengthen the stomach, enliven circulation, and dissipate Blood stasis. Doctors apply green chives to treat menstrual and discharge problems, sore back and knees, incontinence or polyuria caused by kidney Yang weakness.

(4) Bean products, bean sprouts and fermented food

Beans are rich in protein, fiber, and carbohydrates while being very low in fat and sugar, they are warehouses of nutrients needed by the human body (Mitchell 2009). This includes yellow, black, green soybeans, black beans, azuki, mung beans, sword beans, and peas.

Soybeans and soymilk have the function of strengthening the digestive system and moistening dryness. They are more useful for treating chronic and weak cough, chronic diarrhea, etc. Soymilk can promote weight gain in people who are too thin by improving their digestion. People who have arthritis and joint pain may have some relief by eating proper dosage of soy products. Since tofu contains gypsum, the energy of tofu (as defined by TCM) is cooler than soymilk. Therefore, tofu can be used to treat acute eye infection or the lung infection (asthma and cough with green yellow mucus). Tofu will ameliorate conditions of people who have stomach heat alongside bad breath. Black soybeans have a function of strengthening the digestive system and kidney Yin, helping Blood circulation, reducing toxins and water retention.

Those who do not like beans or cannot consume many beans because of health conditions can eat more fermented foods like sauerkraut, miso soup, kimchi, yogurt, natto, dried black bean sauce and vinegar. The beneficial bacteria inside fermented foods can improve immunity, dispel the onset of the flu, inhibit chronic inflammation, support the digestive system, help Blood circulation, ease discomfort in the chest, and relieve palpitations. Natto kinase and vinegar may also soften Blood vessels and dissolve thrombi.

Sprouts contain high levels of concentrated enzymes that make them easier to digest than that of mature beans. Bean sprouts (soybean and mung bean) are used to treat common warts, reduce heat to resolve early stage of urinary tract infection and relieve alcohol hangover.

The active ingredients in tea (green, black, or pu'er), tea polyphenols, are antioxidant substances. Those residents who consume tea often have lower risk of cancer, indicating that tea polyphenols can eliminate free radicals and therefore prevent cancer.

Some doctors recommend Pu'er tea for taking care of digestive health, especially for people with weight issues or difficulty with digesting mixed protein foods. If there is an infection in the colon, with diarrhea and abdominal pain, Pu'er tea can help by reducing the degree of pain and stopping diarrhea. It can help produce the lining inside of the digestive track to protect excess acidity, and such acidity causes ulcers and bacterial imbalances that can result in infection. When people drink excess alcohol and experience a hangover or liver discomfort, Pu'er tea can help reduce the symptoms and eliminate the liver toxins. It can also help improve the symptoms of indigestion, heavy bloating, and refresh the body and breath. People can use this tea as a mouthwash to eliminate

bleeding and soreness of the teeth and gums. Pu'er tea can help the movement of Qi and body fluid, especially in the lung and spleen systems. Drinking it for long period can reduce blood lipids and blood cholesterol, help stabilize blood pressure and prevent artery hardening because it expel mucous and phlegm from inside of organs and Blood vessels. Pu'er cools heat and nourish body fluids, expels summer heat, quenches thirst, and treats constipation and facial pimples (Zhang 2021).

Green tea clears the eyes and head, and aids concentration and alertness. Green tea is a good alternative to coffee for caffeine to aid waking and generate early morning energy. Specifically, early morning tiredness may be caused by blockages in energy flow, which green tea helps to eliminate. It is known to reduce hot feelings in the body manifested as dizziness, thirst and irritability and refreshing the body. Some people, primarily those who have a hot constitution, can use green tea to increase urination, as it helps low output of urine and edema.

(5) Whole Grains

Grains, here mainly rice and cereals, include glutinous rice, wheat, barley, oats, rye, corn, millet, and buckwheat. Grains contain a large amount of soluble and insoluble fibers, B vitamins, and proteins. With mild taste, grains are digestible and absorbable, and an indispensable source of essential nutrients for children and the elderly. Grains can strengthen the spleen and stomach systems. Since properties of grains are multifold, including neutral, cool, or warm, they provide easy choices for individuals and eating in various seasons. For instance, oats and glutinous rice are warm in temperature, so people can have more in the winter.

Oats are rich in protein, calcium, riboflavin, and thiamine, and they are the best cereals of antioxidant food. Daily intake of oats can strengthen the spleen and stomach system, tonifying Qi and Blood.

Buckwheat contains more protein than oat and wheatgrains (Mitchell 2009). Its taste is sweet and its energy is cool. It is used to clear away heat, dampness and toxin, and help in the recovery of people's intestinal function. Both internal and external usage can stop yellow color sweating, treat dysentery, erysipelas and furuncle of heat. The leaves and branch of buckwheat have a function to strengthen the vascular system and prevent bleeding.

Millet is easy to digest, and hence plays a role in benefiting the spleen and stomach system for elderly people who suffer from stomach ailments. Its taste is sweet and its energy cool. If people make millet into form of porridge, there appears a layer of delicate sticky substance on top, commonly known as rice oil. Chinese medicine considers that rice oil is extremely rich in nutrients and has the strongest nourishing power. They even claim that "rice oil can substitute for ginseng soup".

Sweet potato's properties are neutral in energy and taste sweet, and its function is related to the kidney, the spleen systems. Sweet potatoes strengthen the spleen and stomach system by creating energy, smoothing bowel movement,

and therefore doctors use it to treat burning sensations in the stomach and esophagus, constipation, bloody stool and diarrhea.

(6) Algae food and cruciferous vegetables.

Seaweed are spore plants, including Marine algae, kelp, nori, and wakame, etc. Seaweed contains high amounts of minerals such as calcium, iron, magnesium, iodine, phytonutrients lignans, B vitamin folate (Mitchell 2009) etc. Seaweed properties are cold, taste are bitter and salty, it enters the liver, stomach and kidney systems. Marine algae and kelp are noted for the ability to dispel phlegm and soften lumps. Patients who have an enlarged thyroid or have lumps, or muscular nodules can use marine algae as a remedy. Middle age or elderly patients whose immune system are weak, warts are more likely to grow, or hernias to develop. Doctors can use marine algae and kelp to treat. Topically use of marine algae can reduce pigmentation, wrinkles and under-eye bags.

Cruciferous vegetables are common vegetables, and including bok choy, Chinese cabbage, mustard, cabbage, shepherd's purse and radish.

Many herbs belong to this category, such as white mustard seeds and radish seeds. Its medical function is prevention of cancer. In Chinese herbal medicine, radish seeds are neutral in temperature, and sweet and spicy in taste. White mustard seeds are hot in temperature, and spicy in taste. Both of them can be used to regulate Qi, and Blood and expel Phlegm. They can adjust the metabolism of Qi, Blood, and the body fluids. Doctors use them to treat indigestion, fullness of the abdomen, dysuria, constipation, and edema.

Shepherd's purse has function of adjustment of digestive, reproductive system. Its medical usage is to stop hemorrhages, treat vomiting blood, blood in the stool, heavy menstruation, prolonged lochiorrhea, and so on.

17.6 Conclusion

Chinese medical philosophy of Yin-Yang and Five Elements provides unique guidance on understanding of food property and body constitutions. Human health is closely related to natural environment particularly through everyone's diet.

The theory of diet therapy in TCM believes that people should apply food property to balance Yin-Yang, and maintain health. Because people have different constitutions, such as age, gender, health status, and live in varied seasons and geographic location, they need to create a justified and tailored diet.

Enhancing the spleen (stomach) and kidney system are most effective way for health and longevity. Recent research in the literature on the gut-brain axis has revealed that human body and spiritual health influenced by the digestive system, particularly intestinal microbes. Therefore, food therapy is very effective and need to be further development from mixed disciplines.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest I have no conflict of interest.

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