

Chinese Medicine Tips for a Healthy Fall Season

It is that time of year again; the leaves are falling from the branches, the sun is dipping down earlier and the chill in the air is reminding many of us to unpack our winter clothes. According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) the human body is viewed as a microcosm of the natural world around us. We are inextricably linked, thus adjusting the way we live to the changing seasons is a must for maintaining good health and preventing illness.



Here are six basic tips to prevent illness and live in harmony with the fall season.

1. Lightly steam your veggies (and eat warmer foods)

Foods are classified as hot, warm, neutral, cool or cold according to their nature in TCM. Cooling foods like salads and raw veggies may be acceptable in the summer, however in the fall they could be the damp log that puts out your fire. Raw veggies are cooling in nature, but lightly steaming them or cooking with ginger, onion and garlic with warm them up- and you, from the inside out.

2. Wear a scarf

In TCM each season has a corresponding internal organ system, with the lungs belonging to the fall. The lungs are our most superficial organ system involving the skin, respiratory system (including sinuses, nasal passage and trachea), and immune system. The lungs are our first line of defense against invasion from external pathogens that make us sick. As the weather becomes colder and the winds pick up it's our lungs that are most vulnerable, and they are most likely to be invaded through the back of the neck. This is why covering up is a simple preventative measure to protect against cold and flu season.

3. Boost your immune system

Wei qi is the defensive substance that circulates under our skin and keeps unpleasant pathogens out. It is the TCM equivalent to our immune system, and it can be strengthened by taking herbs, medicinal mushrooms (that coincidentally pop up in the fall), and boosting your lung qi. The lungs are in charge of dispersing wei qi to the skin. If you find that you are prone to catching colds or flus you may be in need of rebalancing or strengthening your lung system.

4. Breathe more deeply

One of the best, most simple ways to strengthen the lungs is to breathe deeply. Breathing deeply can improve memory, energy levels and the immune system. With each breath trillions of cells are being washed with oxygen vital to all bodily functions.

This 'pure qi' inhaled from the air is combined with 'food qi' from our stomach to make the vital qi that gives us energy and the cells energy to carry out all physiological processes. So get outside and go for a walk in the crisp, clear autumn air and fill your lungs with all that good qi!

Note: if you have trouble with keeping your nasal passages clear it may be beneficial to use a neti pot throughout the season.

5. Slow down, nourish your yin

Summer was all about yang. It was expansiveness, activity, movement, and it was hot. With the days getting cooler and shorter, naturally our internal cycles are swinging into yin mode. To be yin is to be quiet, slow and introspective. Going to bed earlier will nourish your yin. As the plants turn their energy downward from their leaves into their roots, so too should we start focusing on our roots. The roots or foundation of the body in TCM is the kidney system, and their season is right around the corner...winter! The lungs are considered the mother of the kidneys according to TCM theory. It is standard practice to strengthen the mother in order to tonify the son, thus supporting the lungs in the fall will help prevent falling ill during kidney season.

6. Practice letting go

Strengthening your lungs will reinforce your ability to let go of things that no longer serve you, from your mental closet, to your clothing closet. Just as leaves fall from their branches, so too can your attachments, making room for regrowth and regeneration for you and your plants.

The emotions associated with the lungs are sadness and grief. You may notice feeling more melancholic at this time of year.

When the lungs are out of balance there can be an inability to cope with loss or adapt to change. If your lung qi is weak, you may have a difficult time resolving grief. However, if the grieving process is fully expressed and resolved it can be a cathartic tool that supports your body, mind and spirit. Please note that prolonged grief can lead to injury of the lung system, depression and other issues. Seek help if you can't get over the hump on your own.

The best way to stay healthy according to TCM is to live harmoniously with each season. If we are to be in harmony with the spirit of fall we should be slowing down, getting to bed earlier, covering up, eating warmer foods, and moving inward.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy fall!