

## Oriental Nutritional Guidelines

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One of the most powerful branches of Oriental Medicine is Nutrition. Depending on the quality of what you consume, your diet can be medicinal or harmful. Healthy nutrition provides the foundational energy and substance which nourishes, heals and sustains your body; poor diet depletes, harms and toxifies it. This reference is a general guide to eating according to Oriental Medical principles. As your acupuncturist learns more about you, she can give you more specific dietary recommendations for your constitution and condition.

**“He who seeks Medicine and neglects his diet wastes the skill of his doctors.”  
-Chinese Proverb**

**First Thing's First:** Before getting into the deeper principles of a health-promoting nutritional program, you must first eliminate the fast food, junk food, preservatives, chemicals, sweets, and excess fats in your diet. You will not be able to help your body become and stay healthy if you are regularly eating these types of foods.

If you have an uncontrollable craving for sweets or junk foods, there is an imbalance in your body that is causing it, and you will likely need some specific acupuncture or herbal therapy to help you out of an unhealthy feedback cycle.

The simplest and most profound piece of advice for building health through nutrition is to eat whole, unprocessed foods. Whole foods are those that are recognizable in their natural state: Whole fruits and veggies, such as apples, carrots, cucumbers and spinach; natural meats, such as sliced turkey, a chicken breast, a fish fillet; and whole grains, such as brown rice, millet, corn and oats. These are filled with natural vitamins and minerals, fiber, proteins and enzymes that your body needs. Refined and processed foods, such as crackers, pretzels, chips, white flour, white rice, sugar and sodas are not whole foods. You don't find a doughnut growing in a garden, or a hot dog grazing in a pasture. If they ever had any nutritional value, they have been stripped of it, they have little or no fiber, and they add a lot of sugar, fat and chemicals that wreak havoc with your health as well as your waist line.

**Now What?** Once you've eliminated the junk foods and processed foods from your diet, how do you further modify your diet to support your health goals? This guideline presents sound dietary advice, based on the physiology of digestion, from a Chinese medicine point of view.

**Balance is Key:** Oriental medicine is based on the idea that all dis-ease stems from a disruption in the natural state of balance and harmony between the systems and energies of the body - there is a breakdown in the natural balance (or homeostasis). Oriental medicine focuses on re-establishing healthy balance in the body, so that it can heal its current ills and avoid future ones. Nutrition becomes medicine when one eats a healthy balance of whole food carbohydrates with high quality natural proteins and fats. Oriental

nutritional principles have not changed in many centuries, and have proven themselves to be powerful in helping people regain their health, lose extra pounds, and feel energy, rather than lethargy or indigestion, without needing caffeine.

**Digestive Energetics:** The principles of diet and nutrition in Oriental Medicine are based on the understanding of the energetics of digestion. Your digestive process is based on the organ which, in Oriental medicine, is known as the Spleen. (This is not the same as the Western medicine concept of the spleen. Actually, the Oriental concept of Spleen also includes the function of the pancreas, which is the organ that produces the majority of our digestive enzymes, as well as our insulin and glucagon: the two major hormones that directly regulate blood sugar). The Spleen is coupled with the Stomach in terms of digestive function. If the Spleen is healthy and functioning properly, your food will be digested well and easily; you will assimilate all of the nutrients from your food, so you will have plenty of energy and vitality; and you will have a healthy body weight, naturally.

Healthy Spleen & Stomach energy needs to be established in order to get the full benefit of the food you eat. The problem is that many of the foods Americans eat (and the way we prepare them) on a daily basis are not only lacking in nutrition, but also tax the Spleen and deplete its energy and function, causing things such as indigestion, ulcers, acid reflux, chronic fatigue, Candida yeast/fungus overgrowth, food allergies, water retention, excess mucous formation, respiratory allergies, overweight or underweight, muscle weakness, bowel disturbance, muzzy headedness, high cholesterol levels, heart disease, and countless other ailments.

**“Half the costs of illnesses are wasted on conditions that could be prevented.”**

- **Dr. Joseph Pizzorno**

When we begin to eat in harmony with our body's natural desire for nutrients, in a way that is easily absorbed, we are moving into a whole new level of health, vitality and balance. The body can heal its current ills much more easily, and prevent further illness from occurring. Below is a general list of the types of foods to avoid, as they often cause distress to the Spleen and Stomach functions.

**Cold and Raw Foods:** Anything that is energetically Cold is a difficult burden on the Spleen, eventually depletes the Spleen's energy, and causes symptoms such as abdominal pain and cramping, bloating, gas, watery diarrhea, vomiting, and undigested food in the stool.

**Foods which are energetically Cold, and should be avoided in excessive amounts are undiluted fruit juices, iced foods, iced beverages and desserts, dairy products and raw foods.**

Though salads are full of vitamins, minerals, fiber and enzymes, many raw foods are very energetically “cold”. Usually it is best to eat salads combined with “warming foods” such as ginger dressings, garlic and/or onion to balance out the cold nature. Sushi, which is raw fish, is also extremely energetically cold, and it is interesting to note that traditionally

sushi is served with ginger and wasabi, both of which are energetically “hot”, to balance out the “cold” nature of the sushi. More raw foods can be tolerated if you have a “hot” or “yang” energetic constitution, which your acupuncturist can tell you.

**Damp Foods:** Dampness here is defined as a turbid stickiness or greasiness. Foods can be Damp and burden the Spleen such that pathogenic Dampness accumulates in the body. (In fact, any burden to the Spleen can create internal pathogenic Dampness.) Pathogenic Dampness accumulation in the body manifests as water retention, excess body weight, excess mucous or phlegm in the respiratory or digestive system, feeling of stifling in the chest, Candida yeast/fungus or bacterial overgrowth in the digestive, genital, skin and respiratory systems, joint and muscle pains, elevated cholesterol levels, masses, feelings of heaviness, dizziness and muzzy-headedness. Long standing Dampness in the body can eventually become Phlegm which is much harder to treat and can cause myriad other disorders and symptoms, including poor nutrient assimilation, arthritis, allergies, asthma, heart disease and even psychosis.

**Foods that are Damp and should be avoided are refined (white) grains and flours, all types of sweets & sweeteners, alcohol, dairy products, meats with high fat content, trans fats (or hydrogenated oils), margarine, and anything deep fried. Of course, this includes all processed or denatured foods: breads, cookies, pastries, crackers, chips, pretzels, pizza, candy, chocolate, baked goods, cakes, pies, ice cream, store-bought juices and sodas.**

**Very Spicy Foods:** Eating large amounts of salty & spicy foods, especially if you have a “hot” or “yang” constitution, can damage the Stomach. This can lead to a condition known as Stomach Heat, which manifests as stomach pain, heartburn, ulcers, insatiable appetite, constipation or burning diarrhea, skin problems, insomnia and headaches. Spicy foods are okay in moderation, and beneficial when balancing out “cold” foods, but should be avoided in excess.

### **Foundation of a Healthy Diet according to Chinese Medicine**

**Whole grains:** Brown rice, corn, millet, amaranth, oats, wild rice, quinoa and buckwheat. Whole wheat, spelt, rye and whole barley can be included if there is no gluten sensitivity. Unsweetened rice or oat milks are good alternatives to dairy and soy-based milks.

**Veggies:** All types of veggies, including root vegetables and sea vegetables are highly beneficial, lightly steamed, sautéed or raw. Salads should be eaten with a ginger based dressing (the warmth of the ginger helps moderate the Coldness of the raw veggies.) If you suffer with poor digestion, it is best to eliminate or limit your salads until your digestion is stronger. If you already have strong digestion, you can have salads daily.

**Fruits, whole:** These can be eaten raw, stewed, pureed into puddings and sauces or blended into smoothies (see the Green Smoothie Article), but in moderation. Whole fruit is better than fruit juice, as it contains fiber and is more filling, but if you do decide to drink

fruit juice, juice it yourself (no store-bought juice – they ALL contain added sugar, even those that say they don't, and they are pasteurized, which kills the living enzymes). Add enough water to dilute all juices by 50-75%.

**Oils:** Olive oil and raw coconut oils are the healthiest oils to use as cooking mediums. For salad dressings also try Flax Seed oil or Udo's 3-6-9 Oil Blend mixed with lemon juice and herbs. Small amounts of butter are not harmful, especially if it is ghee (clarified butter).

**Eggs:** As long as there is no egg allergy. It is best to eat them hard or soft boiled or cooked in olive oil. It is not recommended to eat more than 2 egg yolks per day. Free-range and organic eggs are more nutritious, taste better, and don't have the hormones and antibiotics that conventional eggs have.

**Lean Protein:** Such as fish, poultry and other lean meat. Cook it such that grease can run off of the meat, as in a grill or broiler grill. Americans tend to overemphasize animal protein in their diets. Meat should be about 10-30% of your meal. Excess meat consumption (especially non-organic meats) leads to toxification of the body, kidney stones, and uric acid buildup, which contributes to gout and other inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and allergies. Only consume organic or free-range, hormone-free, antibiotic-free meat.

**Beans:** Beans are detoxifying to the body, and the protein found in them can help to regulate blood sugar, water and other aspects of the metabolism, as well as promote proper growth and development of the body and brain. If you have difficulty with bloating and gas when eating beans, try soaking them overnight before cooking, or stay with adzuki beans, lentils, and mung beans, as they are the easier beans to digest, especially when eaten only with non-starchy vegetables. Also, a good digestive enzyme supplement can help you digest your beans easier.

**Soy Products:** New information and studies are showing that soy products that have not been fermented (such as soymilk, tofu, and soy protein powders) are not as healthful as we've been taught. They contain phytic acid, which binds and carries needed minerals out of the body, increasing the risk of kidney stones, anemia and immune system imbalances. And the phytoestrogens in one 8 oz glass daily can be enough to seriously disrupt a woman's hormonal cycle. Unfermented soy may also cause or contribute to thyroid dysfunction in women and digestive intolerance. However, fermented soy products such as tempeh, miso and tamari can be quite beneficial. The phytic acid is destroyed in the fermenting process, and beneficial bacteria are created. These products should always be well cooked, and only organic soy should be used, as most non-organic soy is genetically modified.

**Nuts & Seeds:** As a healthy snack or an accent to salads, cereals and grains, nuts and seeds are beneficial. Be sure to avoid those with oil, sugar or flavorings added and excess salt on them. The healthiest nuts are raw walnuts, almonds, cashews, brazil nuts

and pumpkin seeds. As an alternative to dairy and soy milks, nut milks are a healthful choice.

**Teas:** Green, White and Red Teas are beneficial to the body, offering a wealth of antioxidants, and reducing the risk of hypertension, heart disease and cancer. Green tea has been found to stimulate weight loss; it does contain a small amount of caffeine, which should not be of concern, unless you are very sensitive to caffeine. White tea has less caffeine and more antioxidants than Green tea. Red (Rooibos) Tea also has more antioxidants than Green tea, and has no caffeine at all.

**Clean Water:** Each day, you should be drinking an amount of purified water, in ounces, that is equal to ½ your body weight in pounds. For example, someone weighing 160 lbs, should be drinking 80 oz. of water per day. Room temperature is best; avoid iced water. Water makes up about 80% of the human body, and an even larger percentage of the brain. Chronic dehydration is implicated in many of our modern degenerative diseases, and is the leading cause of headaches and muscle tension. Water helps cleanse all body organs and tissues. Your non-caffeinated, unsweetened teas may count toward this daily goal. If you have been drinking significantly less water than is recommended here, increase your intake gradually. Increasing too quickly can stress the kidneys and cause general malaise.

**What about Supplements?** It is an unfortunate fact that our food is only 50% as nutritious as it was 30 years ago. The soils in which our food is grown are severely depleted. Standard farming practices do not replenish the soil, but turn it into an artificial growing medium using chemical pesticides and fertilizers. In the past, we could get all of our nutrition from the food we ate, and, though organic foods are many times more nutritious than conventionally-grown foods, it is still nearly impossible to get all of our nutrition from food. It has become necessary to take high quality supplements, both to maintain health and, most especially, to help heal a health challenge.

While multivitamins are widely available, the quality can vary greatly. It is best to avoid vitamins, minerals or herbs that you find at drug stores or warehouse stores. Most inexpensive supplements are made from artificial ingredients, which can actually stress the liver and act as toxins. At the very least, they are not well absorbed by the body. If you don't absorb it, your body can't use it. Whole food natural supplements are not stressful to the liver, and are much more easily absorbed; these are your best value.

**Foods to Avoid:** Besides those food listed above that tax the Spleen, there are a few foods and categories that require special attention, which you will need to limit or eliminate from your diet: these are extremely common in the American diet, and are detrimental to health. They are listed here and discussed at length in the Appendices.

Appendix 1: Coffee & Caffeine

Appendix 2: High Fructose Corn Syrup & Soda Pop

Appendix 3: Artificial Sweeteners

## **APPENDIX 1: Coffee & Caffeine**

### **Coffee:**

While there is currently a debate about the potential health benefits of coffee (i.e. containing some antioxidants, warding off certain types of liver cancer and possibly reducing the risk of diabetes), coffee drinkers still have an increased risk of stroke, heart attack, high cholesterol, pancreatic cancer and rheumatoid arthritis. Also, in pregnancy, drinking more than 16 ounces per day increases the risk of miscarriage, birth defects and low birth weight. Therefore, it doesn't qualify as a health promoting food.

Coffee is also one of the most heavily pesticide-sprayed crops, and decaffeinated coffee, unless steam-processed ("swiss-water processed"), contains petroleum-based solvents that are required in the decaffeinating process.

Also, decaf or not, the acid in coffee eats away the villi of the small intestine resulting in poor nutrient absorption, especially of calcium and other minerals. This mineral deficiency is compounded by the fact that the acidity of the coffee leeches calcium out of the bones. It also destroys the beneficial bowel bacteria that assist with digestion and immune function.

And, to add to the detrimental effects of coffee, most coffee drinkers consume this beverage with "additives" such as artificial creamers and flavoring syrups which contain harmful ingredients like hydrogenated oils (trans fats), high fructose corn syrup and/or artificial sweeteners (see appendix 2 & 3).

If you absolutely must drink coffee, the best choice is organic decaf, limited to 12 oz per day.

### **Caffeine:**

Caffeine, in excess, is very taxing to the energy of the Kidneys (in Oriental medicine, the Kidney energy includes the function of the kidneys and adrenal glands), and can lead to or worsen anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, skin problems, fibrocystic breast tissue, intestinal cramping, painful menses, adrenal burnout, depression, headaches and tight or cramping muscle tissue.

Though drinking excess caffeine is a way of life for many people, it will eventually take its toll. Much like drawing too much from a bank account that isn't adequately replenished, you eventually create a serious deficit, causing adrenal burnout and the symptoms listed above. Rebuilding the Kidney and adrenal energy after years of caffeine abuse is a long and arduous road.

If you must have caffeine to get you through the day, your best choice is green tea. If not green tea, then a single 12 oz cup of organic coffee in the morning. Beyond that, your body is telling you that you need good nutrition, a balanced lifestyle, acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine to help you rebuild your depleted energy reserves.

## **APPENDIX 2: High Fructose Corn Syrup & Soda**

### **High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS):**

Since the 1970's many processed food manufacturers and most all soda manufacturers, began replacing the cane sugar and beet sugar (sucrose) in their products, with high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), a sweetener made from cornstarch, because it was less expensive. This type of sugar is a major contributor to the obesity epidemic we are now facing. Not only is it high in empty calories, but it reduces the affinity of insulin for its receptor, which is the principle characteristic of type 2 diabetes. It interferes with your body's signal that tells you when you are "full" and it converts to fat more readily than any other sugar.

Unlike some other types of sugar, it contains no enzymes, vitamins or minerals, so it actually leeches micronutrients from the body. It also interferes with the heart's use of minerals such as magnesium, copper and chromium and has been found to inhibit the action of the immune system's white blood cells (which help you fight infection).

HFCS can only be metabolized by the Liver, and has been found to cause fatty liver disease and non-alcoholic cirrhosis. Given that, it is not surprising that it is also associated with elevated blood LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Ridding your diet of HFCS is essential for anyone wishing to lose weight, control diabetes, hypoglycemia, cholesterol and regain or maintain the health of their heart and immune system. To do this, you must read ALL food labels. HFCS is used both as a preservative and a sweetener, and is found in thousands of products including fruit juices, sweetened teas and beverages, breads, baked goods, breakfast cereals, snack bars, canned fruits, dairy products, cookies, gum, jams, jellies and sodas.

### **Soda Pop:**

Not only does a can of soda contain High Fructose Corn Syrup (see above), which has its own litany of problems, but it is very energetically Damp, and is usually consumed iced, which is very Cold to the Spleen. These things alone are enough to cause significant depletion of the Spleen energy. But to add to it, the caffeine in soda depletes the Kidney energy and taxes the adrenal glands. (see Appendix 1).

Soda also contains phosphoric acid, which leaches calcium from the bones and teeth, leading to osteoporosis, tooth decay and kidney stones. Phosphoric acid also interferes with the stomach's production of hydrochloric acid, resulting in poorly digested food and poor nutrient absorption.

In addition, soda is very acidic, with a pH of about 3, which is comparable to vinegar. Large amounts of this very acidic fluid can erode tooth enamel and acidify the body such that it becomes a more suitable environment for unfriendly bacteria and viruses as well as cancer.

### **APPENDIX 3: Artificial Sweeteners**

All artificial sweeteners are synthetic chemicals which are foreign to the body, and, therefore, act as toxins. 85% of all adverse food reactions reported to the FDA are aspartame-related (aspartame is also known as Nutra-sweet or Equal). It is in a class of chemicals, along with MSG, called “excitotoxins”, meaning that they overexcite nerve cells, causing permanent damage. One of the byproducts of the breakdown of aspartame in the body is formaldehyde. The free-radical damage caused by aspartame is responsible for symptoms such as fatigue, migraine headaches, dizziness, brain fog, tingling or shaking of extremities, mood swings, panic attacks, depression, rapid heartbeat and difficulty breathing. It has also been found in laboratory studies to create and accelerate the growth of cancer cells, as well as brain lesions, reproductive disorders, blindness, mental confusion and many other nervous system disorders.

Further, aspartame may trigger or mimic the following illnesses: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Epstein-Barr, Post-Polio Syndrome, Lyme disease, Grave’s Disease, Meniere’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease, ALS, Epilepsy, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Hypothyroidism, Mercury sensitivity from amalgam fillings, Fibromyalgia, Lupus, non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

Splenda (or sucralose) is not acceptable either; it is sugar that has a chlorine molecule bonded to it. Side effects are surfacing, such as shrunken thymus gland and atrophy of lymph follicles in the spleen and thymus (which are important in immune system function), enlarged liver and kidneys, reduced growth rate, decreased red blood cell count, headache and diarrhea.

If you are using artificial sweeteners to try to lose weight, you are actually making it harder for yourself. Artificial sweeteners have actually been found to increase the appetite and interfere with the body’s insulin response and metabolism. On average, people gain weight when they switch to artificial sweeteners and more studies are confirming the link between artificial sweeteners and obesity & diabetes.

A wonderful natural alternative sweetener is Stevia. Found in most health food stores in liquid or powdered form (most people prefer the liquid form), it is calorie-free and completely natural. It is an extract of the Stevia plant leaf, which is much sweeter than table sugar, and has been found to help regulate blood sugar. Just a few drops of the liquid extract can sweeten a 12 oz beverage. You can also find it at [www.Stevia.com](http://www.Stevia.com).

Raw agave nectar is another wonderful natural sweetener that actually contains beneficial enzymes and vitamins as well. As sweet as sugar, but with a very low glycemic index, it is safe for diabetics. Agave nectar can be found at any health food store or can be ordered from [www.volcanicnectar.com/agavenectar.html](http://www.volcanicnectar.com/agavenectar.html).

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