



WILD ROOTS

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE
& ACUPUNCTURE CLINIC

Dr. Andrea Hansen

Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine
R. Acupuncturist, R. Herbalist

www.wildrootsclinic.ca

Foods that boost digestive function (Spleen and stomach qi)

A diet which strengthens spleen qi focuses on cooked, simple foods with relatively few components in each meal. To get the best quality and most available sources of qi from your food, the food itself should be fresh, seasonal, locally grown and vibrant.

Most foods should be cooked, and yet overcooking to the point of soggy is not recommended as this can destroy nutrient content. Depending on the severity of the spleen deficiency, some raw foods may be advisable, but if not then various degrees of cooking can be implemented such as, light cooking, leaving a residual crunch, moderate or very well cooked in a soup or stew. Soups, broths and stews are ideal. Avoid too many raw fruits (especially) and vegetables as they can be hard to digest. Stew your fruit and steam your veggies. Most definitely do not drink cold beverages with meals as the goal of your stomach here is to turn your chewed foods into soup so it can be absorbed and utilized.

Cold or chilled drinks, unchewed or raw foods increase the work load to your stomach and can cause fullness and indigestion. Never overeat, and do not eat too late at night. Eating at regular times is a good practice.

Care with the volume of carbohydrates is necessary as they can contribute to dampness forming in the body. Please see the section on dampness, as dampness and phlegm are not only a pathological by-product of a damaged or weak digestive tract, but also can encumber or inhibit efficient digestion and lead to bloating and stagnation in the abdomen.

Small amounts of salad vegetables (on sandwiches etc.) maybe added as the spleen strengthens or in hot climates.

Easily digested carbohydrates, such as white rice, oats and starchy roots vegetables should make up the bulk of material ingested, and the remainder is composed of cooked, green, red, and yellow vegetables, and a small proportion of high quality protein. This is especially important in the early stages of a treatment. As the spleen strengthens, of course, other elements can be introduced.

As you will see in other dietary pages, the spleen is the root of health and is needed to make blood and yin, to ensure adequate movement of qi and blood and provides the vehicle for fluid metabolism. You must start by improving this organ's function in most chronic diseases.

Foods to include more of:

All foods cooked and warm, long slow cooking; soups, broths and stews; thoroughly chewing; simple combinations of a few ingredients, smaller meals more often, regular meal times, high complex carbohydrate and vegetable, low meat.

Drink a small cup of warm herbal tea, lemon water, or broth with meals.

Bland, sweet, and warm flavours benefit the spleen. Light grains especially white rice and rice porridge (congee) oats, roasted barley, sweet rice, spelt, pumpkin, sweet potato, celeriac, squash, carrot, corn, parsnip, chickpeas, black beans, yams, peas, walnuts, stewed fruit, chicken, beef, lamb, liver, kidney, mackerel, tuna, anchovy

Spicy foods in small amounts: onion, leek, garlic, turnip, pepper, fresh ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, fennel, kitchen spices.

Complex sweet flavours (small amount): molasses, dates, rice syrup, barley malt, palm sugar

Avoid the practices and foods:

Drinking excessive fluids with meals; overeating; missing meals, eating while working.

Cold natured, uncooked and raw food: salads, raw fruits (whole and juiced, especially citrus), wheat, sprouts, and cereal grasses, raw vegetables especially tomato, spinach, and swiss chard. Tofu, millet, seaweeds, salt, too many sweet foods and concentrated sweeteners should be avoided. Brown rice can be very hard to digest. Antibiotics and high dose vitamin C are considered very cold in nature and impair spleen function.

Congestive, damp generating: ice cream, dairy foods (except a little butter and yogurt), sugar, chocolate, fruit juices, beer, nuts and seeds (except walnuts) and nut butters

The preparation of food can be a significant factor in its overall qi quality and benefit. It goes without saying that meals prepared with pleasure and love, taste better than those that are store bought, or made in haste or resentment. This can be difficult as not everyone likes to cook or has the time. However, making the time and effort to nurture can be an important part of the therapeutic process. Setting aside time on weekends to prepare hearty soups, stocks and stews for the coming week is a way of actively participating in the spleen strengthening process, and has mental benefits that also assist the spleen.

Moderate exercise and deep breathing helps to strengthen the lungs which will in turn benefits the spleen and digestion. In terms of foods, the lungs benefit from the addition of a small amount of pungent and spicy foods, these foods will help to prevent dampness and phlegm from accumulating.

Adapted From: Maclean, Will and Jane Lyttleton. (1998) Clinical Handbook of Internal Medicine. MacArthur, University of Western Sydney.