



What the Ancients Said About a Healthy Diet

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According to traditional Chinese dieticians and physicians, ‘improper diet’ is one of 10 causes of disease. As Traditional Chinese Medicine was developing, doctors observed the *causes* of disease, not merely the symptoms. To avoid disease people needed to live in balance: balance in lifestyle and exercise, balance in emotional and sexual habits, balance in their exposure to the environment, and of course balance in eating habits.

Traditional Chinese doctors discerned a number of principles regarding a “proper” diet. Balanced eating meant moderation in the five flavours (sweet, salty, sour, pungent and acid). Eating a variety of foods was considered very important to ensure adequate nutrition and to avoid an excess of any one flavour, which could cause imbalance to the internal organs. Today, an overconsumption of sugary or salty foods would be an example of excess. Balance in warm (e.g., soups or pungent foods) and cool (raw fruits and vegetables or chilled foods) was also an important principle.

The ancients made reference to both quantity and quality of food. Improper diet was broken into two aspects: irregular eating habits and impure foods. People were taught to eat at regular times, not to eat late at night or to skip meals, and always to avoid overeating.

Slowing down to chew and enjoy one’s food was encouraged. Avoiding distractions (such as working or being emotional) was also considered a principle in regular eating. Today, eating while driving or watching TV, would be discouraged.

Traditionally, Chinese were taught to eat “pure” foods—quality, fresh, and uncontaminated by poor food storage or cooking methods. They were taught to avoid greasy, fried foods and too much alcohol. In modern times, impure foods are a far greater concern. Processed and refined foods, colorings, preservatives, hormones and many other impurities are found in so many of our foods it is much harder to sustain a pure diet.

The most commonly recommended approach was eating to protect and to care for the digestive tract and associated organs. This meant eating foods that were easy to digest (for example, soups, stews, and steamed veggies), and avoiding too many cold-natured foods (such as ice cream, chilled or frozen foods, cold drinks, raw foods). Cold liquids with meals was prohibited as it decreases digestive efficiency. Simply put, hold the ice when pouring your water!

These teachings may have their roots in an ancient time, but even today our bodies still require the same attention and care, making these principles at the core of a healthy diet.