Week 5

Chinese Medicine – Five Elements - Part 1

Nutritional Medicine Department
Session Summary

Chinese Medicine

• Overview of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements of Chinese medicine, their organ and other correspondences

• Relationships among the elements

• Qualities of the elements in balance: the five virtues

• Assessment of elemental imbalances
Overview of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements of Chinese medicine, their organ and other correspondences
Chinese Medicine: Introduction

Chinese medicine is based on a highly sophisticated set of practices designed to cure illness and to maintain health and well-being. These practices also represent an energetic intervention designed to re-establish harmony and equilibrium for each patient according to the holistic principle.

(Kayne & Booker, 2010)
Chinese Medicine: Introduction

• Chinese medicine is based upon the study of humans in harmonious relationships with themselves – in mind, body, spirit and with the universe around them.

• The basic principles of Chinese medicine are rooted in the Taoist philosophy of *yin* and *yang*. These two polar opposites organise and explain the ongoing process of natural change and transformation in the universe.

• The energy field between the poles of *yin* and *yang* gives rise to the universal primal force, *Qi*.

(Kastner, 2009)
Chinese Medicine: Key Concepts

The following key concepts underpin Chinese medicine:

- The balance of *yin* and *yang*
- *Qi*
- The Five Elements – wood, fire, earth, metal and water
- The qualities of foods – thermal (hot, warm, neutral, cool and cold); the five tastes (sweet, acrid, sour, bitter and salty);
- The organ networks - (Spleen-Stomach, Lung-Large intestine, Kidney-Bladder, Liver-Gallbladder and Heart-Small intestine
- The direction of movement (upbearing, floating, downbearing and falling).
Yin and Yang
Yin and Yang

• *Yin* and *Yang* are the fundamental principles at the core of all existence – represent duality, obvious in everyday life.

• Every object or phenomenon in the universe consists of two opposite aspects.
  
  o While *Yin* and *Yang* control each other, they are not fixed but in a state of constant motion.
  
  o [http://i.imgur.com/pOj5dDe.gif](http://i.imgur.com/pOj5dDe.gif)

• Because of their mutual support, the losing or gaining of one aspect will inevitably influence the other e.g. if *Yin* is in excess, then *Yang* will be weak and vice versa.
Qualities of *Yin* and *Yang*

- *Yin* goes in, *Yang* goes out
- *Yin* falls, *Yang* rises
- *Yin* contracts, *Yang* expands
- *Yin* is dense, *Yang* is light
- *Yin* is dark, *Yang* is bright
- *Yin* is matter, *Yang* is energy
- *Yin* is cold, *Yang* is hot

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
First Principles of *Yin* and *Yang*

- **Yin** and **Yang** are opposites.

- **Yin and Yang create each other:** An excess of cold food (**Yin**) can impede the Spleen Qi’s digestive capacity (**Yang**), leading to stagnant fluids (**Yin**), which in turn cause Heat disorders (**Yang**).

- **Yin and Yang consume each other:** Excessive work (**Yang**) depletes a person’s reserves (**Yin**); excessive consumption of cold food (**Yin**) consumes the body's **Yang** energy; smoking (**Yang**) consumes the fluids of the Lung (**Yin**).

- **Yin and Yang are inseparable:** If the **Yin** becomes completely depleted, such as the in the case of the fluids of the Lung, the Lung’s **Yang** capacity to make energy from air also fails.

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University
Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Yin and Yang – in the Body

- Yin is the interior, Yang the exterior.
- Yin governs the front, Yang the back.
- Yin is the lower part, Yang the upper.
- Bones are Yin; skin is Yang.
- Solid organs (Zang) are Yin; hollow organs (Fu) are Yang.
- Blood is Yin; Qi is Yang.
- Deficiency is a Yin state; excess is a Yang state.

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
## Yin and Yang – In Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow/night</td>
<td>Light/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant-based foods</td>
<td>Animal-based food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn, winter</td>
<td>Spring, summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>Up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative stasis</td>
<td>Evident motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kastner, 2009)
# Yin and Yang – in Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tropical fruit</td>
<td>Meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td>Acrid spices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaweed</td>
<td>Shrimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange juice</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppermint tea</td>
<td>Fennel tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>Oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy sauce</td>
<td>Tabasco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat beer</td>
<td>Anise schnapps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steamed foods</td>
<td>Grilled foods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kastner, 2009)
# Yin and Yang – in Diagnostics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yin</th>
<th>Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiet voice</td>
<td>Loud voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks little</td>
<td>Talks a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pale face</td>
<td>Red face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shivering, sensation of cold</td>
<td>Warm, sensation of heat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes warmth</td>
<td>Likes cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow, reticent movements</td>
<td>Fast, strong movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive, insidious onset of illness</td>
<td>Active, acute onset of illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
<td>Acute illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine: clear, frequent</td>
<td>Urine: dark, concentrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongue: pale, white fur</td>
<td>Tongue: red, yellow fur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulse: slow, weak</td>
<td>Pulse: rapid, replete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kastner, 2009)
Yin and Yang - Imbalance

Four possible states of imbalance:

1. Preponderance (Excess) of Yin
2. Preponderance (Excess) of Yang
3. Weakness (Deficiency/Vacuity) of Yin
4. Weakness (Deficiency/Vacuity) of Yang

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Qi

• “Life force” or “life energy” is of primary importance in Chinese medicine.

• Sufficient and freely coursing Qi signifies vitality, health and the body’s capacities-flow via interconnected pathways or meridians.

• When Qi is flowing unobstructed, all life’s processes are in operation in a rhythmic and harmonious way.

• Disease obstructs Qi – when Qi is obstructed, the life-force is weakened (as can be seen by signs and symptoms of illnesses).

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Qi is in constant movement; occurs in 4 different directions:

- Ascending
- Descending
- Entering, moving inwards
- Leaving, moving outwards

(Kastner, 2009)
Qi

The qi that is directly involved in a person’s life has three sources:

• Original Qi (Yuan-Qi) – also called prenatal qi – transmitted by parents to their children at conception. This qi is partly responsible for an individual’s inherited constitution.
• Food Qi (Gu-Qì) which is derived from the digestion of food.
• Gathering Qi (Zong-Qì) which is formed from food qi interacting with Air.

(Kaptchuk, 2000)
The Five Elements

- The theory of the Five Phases, also known as the Five Elements, draws on observations of the world and was developed, like the theory of *yin* and *yang*, as a way of explaining the relationships between all natural phenomena and between humans and their environment.

- The Five Elements are wood, fire, earth, metal and water. They are sometimes called “phases” since they describe changes and relationships within and between living things rather than actual substances or elements.

(Young, 2001)
The Five Elements

- The Taoist model of the Five Phases (or Elements) is an extension of the concept of *yin* and *yang*.

- This model relates the entire spiritual, emotional, material and energetic phenomena of the universe to five basic phases (earth, metal, water, wood and fire).

- These phases do not exist in isolation from each other, but influence each other in a constant, dynamic interaction.

(Kastner, 2009)
## Five Element Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Five Phases</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Fire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fertility, ripening, harvest, inner core (centre), stability (being grounded), sweet flavour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reflection, change, death, acrid (pungent) flavour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Flow, clarity, cold, birth, salty flavour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Growth, bending, childhood, expansion, sour flavour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Heat, flare-up, upbearing, bitter flavour</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kastner, 2009)
The Zang and Fu Organs:

• Each of the five elements corresponds to an “organ network” represented by a Zang organ and a Fu organ.
• Zang organs – usually translated as viscera or solid organs: the Kidneys, Liver, Heart, Spleen and Lung.
• Each Zang organ has a related Fu (“bowel” or hollow) organ: Bladder, Gallbladder, Small Intestine, Stomach, and Large Intestine.
• By convention, a capital letter is used for these “organ concepts” to differentiate the Chinese medicine concept from the Western anatomical understanding.

(Ody, 2000)
The Triple Burner

The “Triple Burner” (San Jiao) is a Chinese medicine concept with the following functions:

• The Triple Burner’s main function is the creation, transformation and movement of bodily fluids, with an emphasis on digestion and excretion.

• The Triple Burner coordinates the distribution and movement of different types of qi to ensure continuous support of organ networks and enable unobstructed movement of qi.

• Disorders appear as accumulation of fluids, such as oedema and urinary retention.

(Kastner, 2009)
The Triple Burner

From a Western perspective, the Triple Burner reflects the anatomical division of the body into three parts:

- The Upper Burner: Heart, Lungs, Pericardium – upward from the diaphragm.
- The Centre (Middle) Burner: Spleen, Pancreas, Stomach – between the diaphragm and navel.
- The Lower Burner: Liver, Kidney, Bladder, Intestine – downward from the navel.

(Kastner, 2009)
## Five Elements: Correspondences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Fire</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seasons</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Late Summer</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Damp</td>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>Cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zang organs</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fu organs</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
<td>Small intestine</td>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>Large intestine</td>
<td>Bladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes</td>
<td>Sour</td>
<td>Bitter</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Pungent</td>
<td>Salty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Eye</td>
<td>Tongue</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tissues</td>
<td>Tendon</td>
<td>Vessel</td>
<td>Muscle</td>
<td>Skin/hair</td>
<td>Bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kayne & Booker, 2010)
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE ELEMENTS
Five Elements - Relationships

(Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FiveElementsCycleBalanceImbalance_02_plain.svg)
Five Elements - Relationships

Not only are the correspondences within each Element important, but the Elements influence one another.

- Creation or Generation cycle (Sheng cycle) – also known as the Mother/Child relationship.
- Control cycle – also known as the Father/Child relationship.
- Destructive cycle – abusive controlling cycle
- Insulting cycle – reversed controlling cycle

(Pitchford, 2002; Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Creation or Generating Cycle

According to Chinese philosophy, the body organs are related to one of the five phases (or elements): wood, fire, earth, metal and water. These are said to represent the circle of life. The five phases have a flow in which they move, called the ‘generating cycle’

- Water generates wood (by nourishing trees)
- Wood generates fire (rubbed together to generate fire)
- Fire generates earth (ashes fall to support the soil)
- Earth generates metal (ore)
- Metal generates water (when molten resembles water).

(Kayne & Booker, 2010)
Creation or Generating Cycle

• The Creation cycle shows how one organ, sometimes called the “mother” organ “creates” or “feeds” the following organ, its “son”, through a strengthening flow of energy.

• For example, the Heart strengthens its son, the Spleen/Pancreas; the Spleen/Pancreas strengthens its son, the Lungs.

• If one organ becomes deficient it may draw excessively from the preceding organ (its mother) and deplete it, and at the same time it will not have the ability to strengthen the next organ, its son.

(Pitchford, 2002)
Control Cycle

- Fire controls (melts) Metal;
- Metal controls (chops down) Wood;
- Wood controls Earth (think of preventing erosion);
- Earth controls Water (mud, dams);
- Water controls Fire (extinguishes).

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Control Cycle

- The Control Cycle represents the process by which Elements “check and balance” one another.

- When the balance is normal and healthful it can be called the Control Cycle.

- If it is not balanced the Control Cycle can become a Destruction Cycle. This occurs when an organ becomes hyperactive or excessive in some way and then, instead of beneficially controlling the next organ in the Control Cycle, attacks it.

(Pitchford, 2002)
Control Cycle

• **Control Cycle example**: Balanced Kidneys protect the Heart, since the *yin* fluid of the Kidneys is distributed throughout the body and protects the Heart from inflammation.

• **Destruction Cycle example**: Kidneys that cause excessive fluid retention weaken the Heart (*Water can put out Fire*).

(Pitchford, 2002)
Five Elements - Relationships

- **Wood** = Liver/Gall Bladder = Parent of Fire; Child of Water; Controls Earth
- **Fire** = Heart/Small Intestine–Heart Governor/Triple Heater = Parent of Earth; Child of Wood; Controls Metal
- **Earth** = Spleen/Stomach = Parent of Metal; Child of Fire; Controls Water
- **Metal** = Lung/Large Intestine = Parent of Water; Child of Earth; Controls Wood
- **Water** = Kidney/Bladder = Parent of Wood; Child of Metal; Controls Fire

(Krieger, 2009)
The Elements in Balance
The Five Virtues
The Five Virtues

• Chinese Medicine holds that the original spirit and its five Virtues – order, trust, integrity, wisdom and compassion – are housed in us at birth and specifically in the corresponding five major organ systems – the Heart, Spleen, Lungs, Kidneys and Liver.

• Accumulated toxic emotional energy from life experience as well as emotional and/or physical trauma can obstruct the healthy nurture of the five Virtues and the health of corresponding organ systems. The embodiment of toxic emotions impedes the natural flow of Qi, in the body, and can cause disease or inflame existing conditions.

(Wood, 2015)
The Five Virtues

The 5 solid organs, classified as *Yin* organs, will take on and embody specific toxic emotions:

- **Heart**: anxiety, shock, unforgiveness and long-term memory of emotional trauma
- **Spleen**: worry, obsession, self-worth issues
- **Lungs**: grief, sorrow, shame, guilt, despair
- **Kidneys**: fear, loneliness
- **Liver**: anger, jealousy, resentment, depression

(Wood, 2015)
The Five Virtues

Contrast those emotions, which can take a great toll on physical and emotional health, with the original attributes the organs manifest when in a healthy, natural state:

• From the Heart: peace order, forgiveness and love
• From the Spleen: trust, openness and resolution
• From the Lungs: integrity, righteousness and courage
• From the Kidneys: wisdom, willpower and the ability to root Divine Will to human will
• From the Liver: compassion and benevolence.

(Wood, 2015)
Assessment of Elemental Imbalances

https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2013/07/12/19/18/balance-154516_960_720.png
Assessment of Imbalances

• A healthy individual is seen as one who lives in harmony with the universe and nature’s seasons and who balances *yin* and *yang* in his or her diet, activities and lifestyle. Such a person has a calm mind and an energetic body.

• It is thought that if *yin* and *yang* become imbalanced then the inevitable result is disease.

• The causes of such an imbalance may be internal or external and disease is precipitated by a disturbance in the flow and function of *qi*, Blood and/or Bodily Fluids.

(Young, 2001)
Assessment of Imbalances

• In Chinese medicine a comprehensive consultation process is used to determine the patient’s constitution and to assess the current state of imbalance.

• Techniques used in the diagnostic process include:
  – Inspection or looking: examining the patient’s appearance, tongue, nose, skin colour, etc.
  – Auscultation and olfaction (listening and smelling)
  – Asking questions
  – Palpation or touching: includes pulse taking as well as feeling the body surface to assess temperature and quality, etc.
Assessment of Imbalances

Observation (Looking):

• **Whole body**
  – Assessment of Spirit (*Shen*)
  – Body appearance: shape, size, landmark appearance, posture
  – Facial complexion: physical traits, colour and overall appearance

• **Local area**
  – Eyes: vitality, sheen
  – Ears and nose: size, shape, relationship to other facial landmarks
  – Lips and mouth: size, shape, open, closed, dry, moist, red, pale, coloured (blue etc.), tongue
  – Skin, hair and nails
Assessment of Imbalances

Listening and smelling:

• Sound of voice, sighing, character of speech, energy of words, choice of language, etc.

• Overall odour: sweet, putrid/offensive, etc.

• Non-verbal behaviour
Assessment of Imbalances

Asking questions

- Presenting symptoms
- Lifestyle questions: occupation, geographical location, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.
- Current diet: cravings, aversions, excesses in diet, etc.
- Nature of secretions: colour, amount, associated symptoms
- Use the framework of the TCM Ten Questions – see next slide
Assessment of Imbalances

TCM Ten Questions
1. Questions about temperature – hot, cold, fever, chills
2. Questions about sweating
3. Questions about the head and face
4. Questions about pain related issues
5. Questions about elimination
6. Questions about digestion – thirst, appetite and tastes
7. Questions about sleep
8. Question about the thorax and abdomen area
9. Questions regarding gynaecological issues
10. Medical history questions including lifestyle and habits
Assessment of Imbalances

Palpation or touching:

• Feeling for information such as areas of hypotonicity, cold, warmth, pain, no resistance
• Temperature of skin, moistness or dryness of skin, turgor, etc.
• Pulse examination
Assessment of Imbalances

• The practitioner gathers information throughout the consultation process and analyses and synthesises the information in order to arrive at a Chinese medicine diagnosis.

• Consideration is given to:
  – *Yin*, *Yang*
  – Deficiency, Excess
  – Cold, Heat
  – Interior, Exterior
  – Specific organ networks, including consideration of creating and controlling cycles.
FOOD CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM IN CHINESE MEDICINE

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2a/Korea-Seoul-Insadong-Sanchon-02.jpg
Food Classification: Introduction

Sun Shu Mao (581-682), a Chinese physician, published the pioneer Chinese diet classic in 652 AD entitled *One Thousand Ounces of Gold Classic* (Lu, 1986).

“To treat an ailment, first use nutritional therapy. Only when that is inadequate should drugs be used.” (Lam, 2006)
### Food Classification

There are four basic criteria for energetic classification of foods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thermal Nature</td>
<td>Hot, warm, neutral, cool, cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavour</td>
<td>Sweet, acrid, sour, bitter, salty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organ Network</td>
<td>Spleen-Stomach, Lung-Large Intestine, Kidney-Bladder, Liver-Gallbladder and Heart-Small Intestine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of movement</td>
<td>Upbearing, floating, downbearing, falling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kastner, 2009)
Food – Thermal Qualities

• **Hot** foods intensify *yang* and *qi*. They activate, warm and disperse external and internal cold, move upwards and outwards and tonify the body’s defensive *qi* (immunity). Examples: alcohol, lamb and cinnamon.

• **Warm** foods strengthen *yang* and *qi*. They especially strengthen the digestive capacity which, among other things, makes Blood. Examples: butter, chicken, onion and squash.

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
Food – Thermal Qualities

• **Neutral** foods build up *qi* and *yin* fluids; they stabilise and harmonise extremes in a meal and in the body. Examples: cheese, peas, rice; grains and beans are neutral to warm.

• **Cool** foods most supplement the *yin* fluids, including Blood. They also clear Heat and slow down *yang* processes, including the movement of *qi*. Examples: yogurt, soybeans, cucumber, greens.

• **Cold** foods clear Heat and calm the Spirit. Examples: salt, watermelon and rhubarb.

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
The Five Flavours

**Wood:** sour
Examples: apples, kiwi, vinegar

**Fire:** bitter
Examples: basil, parsley, dandelion

**Earth:** sweet
Examples: rice, millet, squash

**Metal:** acrid (pungent)
Examples: cinnamon, fennel, garlic

**Water:** salty
Examples: seaweed, shellfish, duck

(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
The Five Flavours

- **Salty** relates to Water and the Kidneys. It regulates fluid in the body and encourages movement inwards and downwards. It softens and detoxifies.

- **Sour** relates to Wood and the Liver and has an astringent effect, encouraging contraction and absorption. The sour flavour helps to overcome stagnation.

- **Bitter** relates to Fire and the Heart, and has a draining and drying effect. It is of most use in excessive patterns and is reduced for those who are Cold and/or deficient.

(Kingham, 2009)
The Five Flavours

- **Sweet** relates to Earth and the Spleen. It is the most building and nourishing flavour. Note that this refers to the natural sweet flavour as found in root vegetables and grains -- refined sweeteners such as sugar, although clearly very sweet, do not have the same nourishing effect.

- **Pungent (acrid)** relates to Metal and the Lung. It promotes the circulation of *Qi* and Blood, dispersing stagnation.

(Kingham, 2009)
Flavours and Organ Systems

- Sourness enters the Liver
- Bitterness enters the Heart
- Sweetness enters the Spleen
- Acridity enters the Lungs
- Saltiness enters the Kidneys

- Sourness enters the sinews
- Bitterness enters the Blood
- Sweetness enters the flesh
- Acridity enters Qi
- Saltiness enters the bones”

(From the Huang Di Nei Jing)
(Adapted with permission from Bastyr University Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course)
The Five Flavours

• In the diet of a healthy person the flavours should be balanced, with the sweet flavour predominating, because the Earth element and its associated flavour, sweetness, are considered the most central aspect of the body and its nourishment.

• When health is poor and during acute disease conditions it is usually helpful to change just two flavours – emphasising one obvious important flavour and restricting a contraindicated one.

(Pitchford, 2002)
The Five Flavours

- The flavours not only create balance but also bring a person into harmony with seasonal influences.
- If there is a contradiction between individual needs and attuning to the seasons, individual needs should be addressed first. For example, a person with oedema usually cannot tolerate salt and so, even though more salt is normally used in winter, those with oedema should not increase salt. Instead they can emphasise the bitter flavour, which is drying and helps to attune the individual to the colder season.

(Pitchford, 2002)
The Five Flavours

- The quantity of flavours is also important.
- If a flavour is generally helpful for an organ function, too much of that flavour has an opposite and weakening effect.
- For example, the sweet flavour benefits the Spleen/Pancreas and digestive function, but too much weakens it resulting in poor digestive function and poor regulation of blood sugar.

(Pitchford, 2002)
General Food Guidelines

General dietary recommendations in Chinese medicine:

• Different sorts of foods should be eaten at different times of the year to reflect the changing balance of the seasons.
• Individual constitution should be taken into account.
• A healthy diet should include regular, moderate meals.
• A person should never eat to full capacity.
• An excess of any of the flavours is likely to lead to imbalance and poor health.
• Avoid exhausting discussions or other distractions (e.g. TV) during a meal.

(Kastner, 2009; Ody, 2000)
Congee

(Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_rice_congee_by_hirotomo_in_Yokohama_Chinatown.jpg)
Congee

• Congee is a thin rice gruel commonly eaten in China for breakfast. It is believed to be easily digested and assimilated.

• Medicinal congees may be prescribed for particular conditions – e.g. aduki bean congee as a tonic food for the Kidneys; used to help with fluid retention and urinary dysfunction.

• One popular breakfast congee contains Chinese red dates, fresh ginger and honey. Ginger is pungent so helps Qi and Blood circulation. The red dates are calming for Shen (spirit) and the honey helps to lubricate the digestive system and nourish the Heart.

(Ody, 2000; Pitchford, 2002)
Congee

Activity

Find two examples of congee recipes that are recommended for specific conditions.
Session Summary

Chinese Medicine

• Overview of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements of Chinese medicine, their organ and other correspondences
• Relationships among the elements
• Qualities of the elements in balance: the five virtues
• Assessment of elemental imbalances
References

Bastyr University. (n.d.) *Introduction to TCM Therapeutic Nutrition Course*


References


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