



Center for Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine, P.A.

HEALTHY NUTRITION AND WEIGHT LOSS

The Chinese perspective on a balanced diet is very different from that in the West. Eastern nutrition aims to assess weaknesses within individual eating habits and digestive capabilities and make dietary changes that will strengthen digestion, enhance metabolism and promote health.

According to Chinese medical theory, a healthy diet incorporates the balance of the five flavors (sweet, pungent, bitter, sour, salty) and the proper use of hot and cold foods. Every food and herb that a person consumes has a particular nature which determines how it will affect one's internal environment. For example, sugary foods cause "dampness" or an accumulation of mucus along the digestive tract; cold foods/liquids cause constriction or contraction of the Stomach muscles hampering circulation within the digestive tract; pungent foods cause the opening of the pores, etc.

As each person has a unique health history and imbalance, there is no one diet that can adequately meet the needs of everyone. Therefore, the role of a qualified practitioner is to tailor a specific dietary plan and herbal formula, incorporating the knowledge of the five flavors and his/her understanding of the patients' underlying imbalance to correct any digestive weaknesses. Acupuncture should be used in conjunction with dietary therapy for maximum results.

HOW DOES ACUPUNCTURE AND CHINESE MEDICINE ASSIST WEIGHT LOSS?

Acupuncture and Chinese medicine assist the body in losing weight by focusing on five main processes or pillars. They are:

- 1. Strengthening the digestive system:** Strengthening the Spleen, Pancreas and Stomach organs allows the body to break down and extract nutrients while sending the waste products to the intestines for proper elimination.
- 2. Increasing and speeding the metabolism:** Boosting the metabolism allows the body to process and utilize nutrients with greater efficiency while providing energy and vitality.
- 3. Promoting more efficient water transformation:** Helps by ridding the body of excess water weight.
- 4. Improving elimination of wastes from the intestines:** By regulating the elimination of the bowels, a balance of consumption and elimination allows optimal nutrient absorption and extraction as well as ridding the body of harmful and toxic accumulations which over time cause illness and disease.
- 5. Eliminating cravings:** By eliminating cravings for sugars and "junk food" the digestive system does not become overburdened by foods which hamper its functioning. This also avoids unnecessary caloric intake.

THE TEN CULPRITS

1. Poor nutrition and improper dietary choices
2. Eating at irregular schedules
3. Overeating or undereating
4. Eating too fast or while “on the run”
5. Eating while upset
6. Overthinking and worry
7. Excessive cold foods and drink
8. Consuming too many calories
9. Consuming too much liquid
10. Improper food combining

Overburdened by any number of the preceding, the Spleen and Stomach systems become increasingly unable to perform their duties and weight gain is often the result.

DIETS DON'T WORK!

From a Chinese medicine perspective, it is clear why most diets are ineffective at causing long-term weight loss. While some may offer dramatic short-term results, none address the five pillars of weight reduction or the ten culprits according to Chinese medicine.

- Drinking lots of water before meals: overburdens Spleen and prevents proper fluid metabolism.
- Grapefruit/Fruit juice: abundance of sugar and cold temperature causes improper fluid transformation and stagnation in the digestive tract.
- Psyllium, fiber and bran, etc.: creates turbidity in the intestines, especially when mixed with milk or juice.
- Purgatives/Laxatives: weakens the Spleen, Stomach and Pancreas organs and prevents proper extraction of nutrients leading to malnutrition.
- Diaphoretics: improper use of stimulants such as Ephedra, Hydroxycut, and Amphetamines depletes Kidneys, Heart and Lung systems.
- Atkins: excess protein consumption taxes the Kidney system which, along with the Spleen is the main source of our metabolic “fire.” High animal protein diet also “thickens” the blood.
- Zone: eating proteins, carbs and fats in same meal leads to improper digestion, fermentation and production of toxic wastes.

Understanding and using proper nutrition is one of the most important things we can do to ensure good health.

In Chinese medicine, the Spleen-Pancreas (hereinafter referred to just as Spleen) transforms and transports food and fluids. It's the Spleen's job to break down and assimilate what we consume; it pulls out the vitamins, minerals, nutrients—the essence—of our food and drink and uses them to make energy and blood. The Spleen supplies the rest of the body with energy and nutrients. It is able to perform these functions only when healthy and adequately supplied by yang/fire (metabolic force) from the Kidneys.

The Kidneys store our essence. They are like our savings account; all our energy reserves are stored there. If we tax our bodies (and/or minds) through immoderate living, we debit our savings. Without replenishment, eventually our reserves run out, just as a car eventually breaks down if we don't supply it with fuel and oil.

What Depletes the Spleen and Kidneys?

From a nutritional standpoint, the following items and actions damage the digestive system: overeating and overdrinking, undereating or underdrinking, sugary foods, greasy or fatty foods, too much dairy, and cold and raw foods (including cold liquids). (See the Ten Culprits above.)

Overeating—Overeating refers to eating more than that which makes you about 70% full. It also refers to eating when not hungry.

Undereating—Undereating refers to not eating enough nutrients and quality food to sustain your body's energy requirements. It also refers to *not* eating when you *are* hungry.

Sugary Foods—These include refined sugars and any food or drink with a large percentage of sugar. They obviously include candies, chocolates, cookies, and the like. They also include fruit juices, the nutritional value of which is overshadowed by their tremendous sugar content (30+ grams of sugar per 8 oz serving). Whole fruits, however, are recommended (2 servings per day).

Greasy or Fatty Foods—These include fried foods and foods high in saturated fats.

Cold and Raw Foods—Cold has two meanings. One is physical temperature. Our body's natural environment is 98+°F, and when we consume food or drink that is chilled or frozen, it puts our digestive organs into shock. Cold has the nature of contracting and constricting and therefore prevents proper circulation in the digestive system.

Our Spleen must expend its yang/fire (metabolic force) to bring the cold food or drink to body temperature prior to assimilating it. It then must expend more energy to assimilate and extract the essence. This depletes the Spleen twofold and over time damages and weakens the digestive fire.

The second meaning refers to raw foods. Despite their physical temperature, raw foods are considered cold in that they require Spleen yang to work extra hard to break them down. This depletes metabolic fire and weakens the system.

If you eat raw foods, we recommend you use digestive aids such as the warming aromatic herbs ginger, onion, cardamom, fennel, garlic, cloves, and cinnamon. This is why sushi is always served with plenty of ginger, daikon, and wasabi.

Excessive Dairy—Consuming too much dairy taxes the digestive system and creates what we call in Chinese medicine “dampness.” Dampness has many meanings, but for our purposes, we can think of it as excessive mucus that lines the digestive tract.

Penetrating the gut linings, extracted nutrients go into the blood for transportation to the rest of the body. When dampness exists, however, it diminishes or prevents this absorption, and the body is unable to benefit from the food. Thus, you can eat a great meal and receive absolutely no benefit if dampness exists.

The Spleen is the main organ that transforms fluids. If it becomes weak for any reason, it becomes unable to perform its functions, fluids stagnate, and dampness forms.

Signs and symptoms of dampness include gas; bloating; abdominal distention; thirst without any desire to drink; nausea and vomiting; heaviness in the body, limbs, and head; poor memory; sluggishness; and lethargy.

How to Keep Your Digestive System Strong

Heed the Above—Eat a diet high in lightly cooked or steamed vegetables, and liberally use warm and easy-to-digest foods spiced with herbs to aid digestion. Avoid the types of food listed above. Be careful not to overeat or undereat, and make sure you receive sufficient nutrients through quality food.

Regular Schedule—Another key factor to optimal digestive health is regularity in eating. The digestive system craves regularity and routine. The digestive organs prepare for food. Their energies gear up to receive the food and break it down. If you eat breakfast at 6 AM one day, 7 AM the next, and 8 AM the following, the Spleen and Stomach don't know when to prepare for the meal. So they gear up at the wrong time, which depletes their energies. They then need to receive and assimilate food when they're *not* ready, which further depletes energy. Food ends up being poorly digested and starts to ferment, putrify, and form toxins.

Right Time, Right Amount—You might have heard it said to eat like a prince at breakfast, a merchant at lunch, and a pauper at dinner. It's a good guide.

Every two hours, a different organ system's energy is most abundant. For the Stomach, that is between 7 AM and 9 AM, and for the Spleen, it is between 9 AM and 11 AM. Thus, our digestive system is most able to handle food between 7 AM and 9 AM, and the Spleen is most able to extract and assimilate between 9 AM and 11 AM.

During the opposite times (between 7 PM and 11 PM), those organs have the least amount of energy. Thus, it's unwise to eat large amounts in the evening. Your meal will sit in your Stomach and not be properly broken down.

Five Flavors—Incorporate each of the five flavors into your meals: acrid (spicy, pungent), bitter, salty, sour, and sweet (from the complex carbohydrates in grains and vegetables, not from refined, simple sugars). Each flavor is associated with a different pair of organs and helps to stimulate and harmonize your internal organs when used appropriately.

Emotions—Emotions affect the ascent and descent of digestive Qi (life force energy). They can prevent the separation of the pure and turbid, resulting in food stagnation and dampness. Overthinking and worry weaken Spleen and Stomach energies, and fear and depression weaken Kidney fire.

To better manage the effects of emotions on the digestion of your food, some general guidelines include:

- Don't eat or drink when upset.
- Don't eat or drink with people you don't like.
- Be mindful when eating or drinking. Concentrate on your food or drink, on chewing and tasting, and on enjoying the food.
- Don't be distracted while eating. Avoid thinking about other things, reading, or working. Avoid eating on the run or while in a hurry.

Combinations—The way you combine food within each meal is also important. Improper food combining can result in poor digestion and stagnant food that ferments, putrifies, and causes toxin production.

Proteins require an acidic environment to be properly digested, and carbohydrates require an alkaline environment. Combining the foods in the same meal diminishes or prevents proper digestion.

Chew Well—Equally important is the proper chewing of food. Saliva contains alkaline enzymes that begin to break down carbohydrates in your mouth. The Spleen thrives on an alkaline environment, so thorough chewing allows the enzymes to alkalize your food, taking some burden off of the Spleen.

Applying these guidelines to your nutrition will yield profound health changes. When we understand how everything we eat and/or drink has an impact on our health, the knowledge guides us to take more time and consideration regarding our food choices.