
YIN DEFICIENCY

Yin represents the fluid or water aspect of the body. It serves as the homeostatic counterbalance to heat and has both a physical and an emotional component. Physically, Yin lubricates us (joints, intestines...), it is the material basis of all body tissue. On an emotional level, yin grounds us, it is the tempered aspect of our disposition. Yin deficiency can result from both physical and emotional causes. If we push too hard, sweat too much, sleep too little and so forth, yin reserves are tapped more quickly than they are replaced. Likewise, if we allow ourselves to become hot tempered, frustrated or if we are faced with a difficult life change, then yin can likewise become depleted. Constitutionally, some people may run slightly dry (skin, mouth, hair...) which often evidences an underlying Yin Deficiency. Yin is best replenished through rest, relaxation, meditation (or similar practices) and through diet. For the Yin Deficient person, it is best to minimize hot, spicy foods, bitter foods (which drain heat), stimulants (like coffee), alcohol and overly sweetened foods and focus more on cool, moist foods. Special care should be taken when nourishing Yin since Yin tonifying foods (especially those from animal products) tend to be moist and slower to digest. Because of this, they risk causing stagnation, specifically in the form of dampness. Likewise, since it is best to eat a predominantly neutral to warm diet, we must be careful not to overly-cool ourselves when nourishing our Yin.

Yin Nourishing Foods (mostly sweet and cool)

Apple, Duck, Milk, Pork, Sweet Potato, Asparagus, Egg, Mulberry, Rabbit, Tofu, Avocado, Frog, Nettle, Royal jelly, Tomato, Banana, Honey, Oyster, Seaweed, Watermelon, Cheese, Kidney bean, Pea, Sesame, Wheat, Clam, Lemon, Pear, Spelt, Yam, Crab, Malt, Pineapple, Spinach, Cuttlefish, Mango, Pomegranate, String bean

YANG DEFICIENCY

Yang represents the heat or fire aspect of our bodies. It serves as the homeostatic counterbalance to the fluid, Yin aspect and has both a physical and emotional component. Physically, Yang provides the heat upon which all physiologic processes depend and ensures that the Yin and Blood of the body is distributed to all the body's tissues. From an emotional perspective, Yang represents the functional aspect of all expression. Yang initiates our interaction and connection with others and the outside world. In excess, Yang can cause us to overheat physically and to be less capable of fluid social interaction. To build Yang requires that we guard our body's heat by adequately covering up, build internal heat through physical activity, engage in activities and interactions that are meaningful and exciting to us and adjust our diet to include warmer foods and cooking methods. When focusing on Yang foods, be careful not to over-heat it. Warm is better than hot. Excessively hot and spicy foods tend to cause heat to escape to the surface of the body, induce sweat and ultimately result in a cooling, rather than warming, effect. Just like Yin, Yang is best nourished slowly and not within the context of a drastic change in eating patterns.

Yang Tonifying Foods (typically sweet, pungent and warm)

Nutmeg, Shrimp, Pistachio, Star Anise, Quinoa, Thyme, Rosemary, Trout, Sage, Venison, Savory, Walnut

QI DEFICIENCY

We often think of Qi as “energy”, but this doesn’t encapsulate the depth and breadth to which “Qi” refers. Very practically, Qi is a product of the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink. Transforming air, food and water into Qi both takes energy and creates energy and is mediated by our own physiological disposition (do we run warm or cold, moist or dry...) and lifestyle (exercise, stress...). Every aspect of our physiology (movement, digestion, immunity...) requires Qi. As such, a deficiency of Qi presents with great diversity, from fatigue and shortness of breath to indigestion and frequently getting sick. Building Qi is similarly diverse. From the starting point of clean air, fresh water and well sourced, seasonal food, we can maximize these raw materials by practicing deep, as opposed to shallow breathing, carrying ourselves with an open, as opposed to a sunken chest, eating only when calm, chewing food adequately and regularly exercising and stretching the body so as to avoid the pitfalls of a sedentary life. The best dietary sources of Qi provide a slow, even release of energy (complex as opposed to simple carbohydrates) and are as naturally grown or raised and minimally processed as possible.

Qi Tonifying Foods

Almond, Fig, Beef, Ginseng, Carrot, Goose, Cherry, Grape, Chicken, Chickpea, Herring, Coconut, Lentil, Date, Licorice, Eel, Longan Fruit, Egg, Mackerel, Rice

BLOOD DEFICIENCY

In Chinese medicine, Qi and Blood are interdependently intertwined. Qi is responsible for the creation of Blood and Blood is responsible for nourishing all the body’s tissues (and thereby providing the palette upon which Qi operates). Blood is the material aspect of Qi and Qi is the energetic quality of Blood. Without one, the other has no utility. Beyond the physical, Blood is said to provide the ground upon which the mind resides. Blood, quite literally, is the basis upon which the mind-body connection exists. An adequate supply of Blood supports a well rounded, strong and emotionally intelligent mind. In its deprivation, a lack of Blood causes us to feel out of touch, unstable, unfocused and lethargic. Blood is nourished through a fine balance of activity and rest, and is supported with fresh, chlorophyll-rich vegetables and small but complete sources of high quality protein. Blood can be damaged through consumption of processed foods, poor quality or denatured oils/fats, heavily salted foods and overly sweet foods. In the list below, you will see that a diverse range of meat and seafood, beans and legumes are helpful for nourishing blood.

Blood Nourishing Foods

Azuki bean, Chicken, Eggs, Kale, Mussel, Seaweed, Apricot, Cuttlefish, Kelp, Nettle, Spinach, Beef, Dandelion, Kidney bean, Octopus, Beetroot, Dang Gui, Leafy greens, Oxtail, Stout, Black Soybean, Date, Liver, Oyster, Squid, Bone marrow, Fig, Longan Fruit, Parsley, Sweet Rice, Cherry, Grape, Microalgae, Sardine, Tempeh, Watercress

ESSENCE DEFICIENCY

Yin, Yang, Qi and Blood are the basic building blocks upon which each of us are made and function. Essence (or “Jing”) serves as the reservoir from which each of these rely for their continual replenishment and interaction. Jing is both inherited (it is our genetics and our disposition and capacities formed in our early childhood) and can be nourished and protected through appropriate lifestyle and diet choices. With adequate Jing, we have few developmental difficulties, grow strong and fertile, recover quickly from illness and injury, have adequate energy and concentration and age with grace and few complications. Jing is thought to be stored in the Kidneys and Adrenals. By over-indulging in life’s excesses (overly stressful or physical lifestyle, over-use of stimulants and drugs, excessive sexual activity) and giving ourselves too little rest (both physical and psychological) directly impacts our fundamental health outcomes. By safeguarding Jing through a proper lifestyle, including the following nourishing foods can be very helpful. Bone-based soups (both from meat and fish), spirulina and other micro-algae, nutrient rich foods (eggs, nuts, seeds...) and, in general, Yin nourishing foods are helpful.

Particularly Strong Jing Tonics

Almond, Artichoke leaf, Bone marrow, Chicken, Egg, Kidney, Liver, Microalgae, Milk, raw Mussel, Nettle, Oyster, Pollen, Royal jelly, Seaweed, Sesame seed, Walnut, Goji Berries

SHEN

Shen in Chinese Medicine refers to our spirit, our fundamental consciousness. It is glimpsed in the sparkle of our eyes, or lack thereof and, though formless like qi, has broad ranging implications for our overall disposition, outlook, energy, mood and behavior. Shen refers less to the brain and more to the mind - it is the conscious aspect of our Blood and our Hearts. It is at once a mirror, reflecting its influences back on the environment and a filter, digesting and synthesizing phenomena based on its current state. When the Shen is unobstructed, we are afforded insight and clarity. When disturbed, our Shen can grow anxious and sullen. While Shen is not body, it relies on the physical for its residence and is thus particularly sensitive to both physical health and the diet we keep.

Mildly Calming Foods and Herbs

Bitter Orange flower, Celery, Chamomile, Frankincense, Hops, Jamaican Dogwood, Lavender, Lettuce, Mistletoe, Motherwort, Mulberry, Sandalwood, Valerian, Warm milk, Wheat,

Mildly Calming Supplements

Vitamin C, Folic acid, Calcium, Magnesium, Selenium

Mildly Mood Lifting Foods

Arnica flower, Basil, Bilberry, Blueberry, Ginkgo, Ginseng jasmine, Melissa, Oat, Rose, Rosemary, Sage, St. John's Wort, Scullcap, Tea

DAMPNESS

“Dampness” in Chinese Medicine refers to what is considered a pathological aspect of moisture in the body. Regardless of its location, addressing it always involves the digestive system (Spleen-Pancreas in Chinese Medicine). Physically, Dampness slows down our body’s systems and can make us feel heavy, bloated, swollen, tired and foggy headed. Dampness often results from over-consumption of fried, greasy, cold, overly fatty and other difficult to digest foods, overeating, living in a damp, humid environment and from leading a predominantly sedentary life. Dampness can also result from a failure to fully expel a pathogen, especially those of the gastrointestinal tract. Since all Dampness relates in some part to the digestive system, the first step in its treatment invariably involves maintaining a healthy weight (or safely losing excess weight), eating smaller meals with less or no dairy, raw foods, cold foods, simple sugars (including sweet fruits and fruit juice like orange and tomato), wheat (and any yeast products like bread and beer) and overly fatty/rich foods (like pork and other fatty meats). A bit of research into food combining is also helpful, though this is too complex a topic to discuss here.

There are three basic manifestations of excess Dampness in the body: 1) General Dampness (poor digestion, fatigue, sore muscles...); 2) Water Retention (edema); 3) Phlegm (a more developed form of Dampness that can refer to a wide range of symptoms from actual mucus in the lung to a more ephemeral type of phlegm that clouds and deeply disturbs the mind).

Dampness Relieving Foods

Azuki bean, Caraway, Green Tea, Marjoram, Radish, Alfalfa, Cardamom, Horseradish, Button mushroom, Rye, Anchovy, Celery, Mustard leaf, Scallion, Asparagus, Clove Coriander, Job's Tear Barley, Kidney bean, Onion, Oregano, Turnip, Umeboshi, Basil, Corn, Kohlrabi, Parsley, Plum, Buckwheat, Daikon, Lemon, Pumpkin, Garlic, Mackerel, Quail

Foods for Water Retention

Azuki bean, Broad bean, Frog, Mackerel, Sardine, Alfalfa, Celery, Grape, Mung bean,

Seaweed, Anchovy, Clam, Job's Tear Barley, Pea, Squash, Asparagus, Fenugreek, Kelp, Plantain, Tea, Kidney bean, Plum, Watercress, Basil, Black Soybean, Cornsilk, Duck, Lettuce, Raspberry leaf, Rice, Water Chestnut

Foods for Removing Phlegm

Almond, Grapefruit, Mustard leaf, Peppermint, Tangerine peel, Apple peel, Black Pepper, Celery, Clam, Grapefruit peel, Lemon peel, Licorice, Mustard seed, Olive, Onion, Orange peel, Persimmon, Plantain, Radish, Seaweed, Tea, Thyme, Walnut, Watercress, Daikon, Marjoram, Pear, Shiitake, Garlic, Pepper, Shrimp

WIND

Colds and Flus in Chinese Medicine are caused by Wind and its capacity to penetrate the outer surface of the body. Once penetrated, Wind readily attaches to cold, heat or dampness in the body and presents with acute, often conflicting symptoms, such as combined chills and fever. Temporarily simplifying the diet (by limiting slowly digested, dampening foods), eating appropriately spicy foods (which energetically move up and out and specifically assist the body to open its pores) are particularly helpful for releasing the pathogens carried by a Wind attack.

Wind Heat

Borage, Chinese Cabbage, Eucalyptus, Mint, Spearmint, Burdock root, Chrysanthemum, Lemon Balm, Oregano, Turnip, Catnip, Echinacea, Lime flower, Peppermint, Yarrow, Chamomile, Elderflower, Marjoram, Sage,

Wind Cold

Basil, Chili, Ginger (fresh), Peppermint, Black Pepper, Cinnamon, Leek, Rosemary, Caraway, Coriander leaf, Mustard leaf, Sage, Cayenne, Garlic, Onion, Scallion,

Wind Damp

Basil, Cayenne, Job's Tear Barley, Juniper, Onion family, Peppermint, Spearmint, Tangerine peel, Turnip, Cherry, Kohlrabi, Radish, Thyme, Eel, Mustard leaf, Rosemary, Turmeric

QI STAGNATION

The smooth flow of Qi is evidenced with a capacity to meet life's challenges, both big and small, with poise and grace. When Qi Stagnates, our emotions are the first to show signs. Though Qi Stagnation speaks to both the emotional (frustration, irritability) and physical (many aspects of pain) and can be caused from a diverse range of either, it is most often considered a diagnosis relating to our emotional well-being. Acute and persistent irritability can lead to physical problems (digestive upset, a tight chest, clenched hand, sighing, high blood pressure, headaches...), which shows how emotionally related Qi Stagnation finds expression in the physical body. In addition to working with our afflictive emotions through meditation and related practices, Qi Stagnation is most quickly addressed through exercise and physical movement. The process of moving through Qi Stagnation can also be supported through diet. When life's stress builds, and the Qi stagnates, we are advised to minimize heavy and hard to digest foods, including all sugar and stimulates (which cause stagnation in the wake of their stimulation) and include small doses of spice to mitigate the sluggish aspects of digestion.

Foods for Assisting the Movement of Qi

Basil, Clove, Kohlrabi, Plum, Turnip, Caraway, Coriander, Marjoram, Radish, Vinegar, Cardamom, Dill seed, Mustard leaf, Squash, Watercress, Carrot, Fennel, Orange peel, Star Anise, Cayenne, Garlic, Peach, Tangerine peel, Chive, Grapefruit, Peppermint, Turmeric

BLOOD STAGNATION

Blood Stagnation is very similar to Qi Stagnation in that it involves both a physical and emotional level. On a physical level, Blood Stagnation manifests where there is fixed pain, swelling and clotting. Emotionally, since our consciousness (or "Shen") is thought to reside in our Blood, Blood Stagnation can have a direct and immediate affect on our state of mind. Regardless, Blood Stagnation is considered more physical than emotional and so its treatment focuses less on the psychological. To that end, diet can be helpful. Please note that most foods that help with the movement of Blood are warm (warm things generally move more than cool things) and so particular care should be given in cases of Blood Stagnation due to Heat.

Foods that Facilitate the Movement of Blood

Radish, Sweet Rice, Saffron, Rose, Scallion, Turmeric, Shark, Turnip, Chestnut, Hawthorn Berry, Peach, Sturgeon, Vinegar

COLD

Cold isn't often found in excess in the modern world (Yang Deficiency is more predominant) – its presentation typically requires exposure to elements from which we have generally found insulation. However, a Cold climate's capacity to penetrate deeply into the body is unique and Cold as a pathogen does persist in an albeit smaller variety than may have historically occurred when frost bites and hypothermia were more common. Today, Cold most commonly is said to penetrate into joints (causing cold, achy, osteoarthritis symptoms), the uterus (causing contraction, obstruction, pain, infertility) and the digestive system (through the overconsumption of cold natured and cold temperature foods). Emotionally, Cold translates to fear and that which finds us retracted and slower to act. Cold is avoided through a protected environment, adequate clothing, application of warm objects to cold areas of the body (a hot water bottle on the abdomen or feet for instance), friendly and nurturing relations with others and through a willingness to confront and work with underlying fears and emotional traumas. Through diet, warm methods of preparation (slow cooking and stewing) with warm, sweet foods are best. For acute colds (Wind Cold Attack), warm pungent foods are recommended.

Warming Foods

Spearmint, Squash, Sweet Rice, Trout, Turnip, Vinegar, Walnut, Wine

HEAT

Excess heat is less common in the modern world than it was during the times of rampant acute infection and plagues, though it does regularly appear in the form of acute flus and high fever related illnesses and in the form of chronic infection and inflammatory conditions. Initially, heat generally enters the body in the form of a flu or can arise from over consumption of hot foods and unexpressed emotions and emotional upset. Over time, heat can injure fluids and lead to Yin Deficiency, a distinction of vital importance for the safe and effective treatment of excess Heat. Nutritionally, it is advised to avoid hot foods and eat more cool foods (with cooler methods of preparation). .

Cooling Foods

Alfalfa, Cabbage, Grapefruit, Olive, Spirulina, Pear, Tofu, Peppermint, Tomato, Persimmon, Watermelon, Potato, Wheat, Radish, Salt, Seaweed
