

# Chinese Medicine and Food Therapy

## Lecture Series

### Spring – Time to Tame the Liver!©

#### 1) Introduction

- a) The ancient Chinese recognized the seasons of nature affect us, and incorporated this knowledge into Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). They also recognized that different seasons affect our different organs in specific ways too. These and other correspondences became known as “Five Element” system and corresponds to the philosophy that the basis of human evolution, strength and health derives from harmony with nature, and being familiar with and knowledgeable of this life process.
- b) The “Five Elements” system is the basis for TCM, a complex system of medical philosophy or theory, and we will review the system primarily as it corresponds to our diet can we can do our own ‘Food Therapy’.
- c) This is a brief introduction into understanding how our health can be affected by the seasons and how eating a diet that corresponds to the season will help us stay balanced and healthy, specifically focusing on the current season, *Spring*.
- d) My personal philosophy is that only through educating oneself and taking responsibility for one’s health can one have a healthful life and have any health problems treated successfully. This is best expressed simply as “You alone can help yourself Heal” (from Carolyn Myss, famous author and medical intuitive)!! I believe everyone here today can relate to this principle.
- e) Please note that I cannot diagnose any health conditions specifically today, but rather my aim is to help you gain knowledge today that can be the beginning of a process for understanding how food can be used therapeutically.
- f) Notes:
  - i) I highly recommend eating non-GMO, organic or pesticide and herbicide-free unprocessed food whenever possible.
  - ii) Qi is pronounced ‘Chee’ (and also seen spelled as Chi).

#### 2) Five Element System

This is a set of correspondences or connections based on how we are affected by the natural world around us. Think of it like a network; everything is inter-related and all is energetically inter-connected. See attached **Five Element Chart**.

- a) Season – we are affected by the seasons and need to eat accordingly
- b) Organ – specifically, our organs are affected by the seasons
- c) Flavor – we especially need to eat flavors that will balance our organs in the season that most affects it
- d) Physical Features – each organ has a corresponding sense, tissue or other physical features related to it
- e) Emotion or mental aspect – each organ has a commanding emotion also (see attached ‘Negative Emotions Creation Cycle’ chart)

#### 3) Food Therapy: Properties and Flavors of Food

All foods, and correspondingly, all herbs (and spices) have properties, or what we call in TCM, certain ‘energetic’ properties. The energetics of foods are: hot or warm, cold or cool, and moist or damp, or dry. For example, foods that are hot and spicy to the taste (usually) are hot or warm-natured, whereas foods that are uncooked or raw, tend to be of a cooling or cold nature. Eating according to season in regards to the

energy or nature of food is of great importance. It is normal to need cold or cooling foods in the heat of the summer, whereas we need to eat hot or warming foods such as heavy and spicy foods in the wintertime. The nature or 'energy' of food is changed by cooking, however, it is not necessarily changed by the physical temperature of it (i.e., whether the food is room-temperature or just out of the refrigerator), although one can still be affected by the temperature in this way. For example, it is best to drink water or fluids room-temperature or warm since cold or iced drinks are considered damaging to the digestion in general. This can easily be understood by thinking of our bodies as having a 'digestive fire' (we are actually hot at 98.6 degrees or so) which converts or 'cooks' our food. So consuming cold-energetic drinks regularly will eventually 'put out' our digestive fire.

As seen in the Five Element Chart, each organ system has a corresponding 'Flavor' which has its effect upon that organ. This effect can be either positive or negative. If too much of a particular flavor is eaten, this can have a weakening effect on the organ. For example, a small amount of sweet flavor is beneficial for the digestive system, and actually can strengthen it, whereas an excessive amount has a detrimental effect, such as leading to having diabetes. Also, since the flavors reflect the actual nature or property of a food, it is not always equivalent to what we perceive the taste of the food to be either.

Therefore, maintaining our health is a result of balancing the energetics of the food in our diet, along with the flavors in our diet, and tailoring these to the season and the individual's constitution and/or disease patterns.

#### 4) *Spring = Liver*

- a) Note: the organ *Liver* here is capitalized to reflect the 'organ network' and all of its correspondences as represented in the Five Element System. For example, the *Liver* companion organ is the *Gallbladder (GB)*, so it is also especially affected in the *Spring*.
- b) *Spring* is the time of renewal and a 'time of planting seeds, both physically and mentally'.<sup>1</sup> The energy of the plants and trees are lifting up and out. Our energy is renewed as well, and the *Liver* is especially affected since the body has taken on the heavier, fatty foods of winter. This is why it is also a perfect time for cleansing, since we also will tend to want to eat lighter in the *Spring* after the cold and long, dark days of winter.
- c) Refer to attached document "Detox Diet" if interested in doing a 'Spring Cleanse' (season change is an especially excellent time to do a 'cleanse'). This is a mild, detoxifying cleanse that isn't too difficult to do - the hardest part is that it is eating very healthy, as we should be doing anyway – no caffeine, very limited carbs/sugars, no dairy. To prepare for a cleanse, slowly reduce caffeine, sugar and grains (especially wheat) for 7-10 days beforehand.

#### 5) *Spring = Sour Flavor*

The *sour* flavor is not found with any frequency in the modern American diet today, unfortunately. Some people may occasionally eat dill pickles or sauerkraut or grapefruit or a tart green apple, but that almost encompasses the sour flavors in most of our diets. This flavor:

- a) Stimulates digestion and metabolism by breaking down fats and proteins.
- b) Helps fat metabolism through stimulation of bile, aiding fat absorption.
- c) Dissolves minerals for absorption, to stimulate contraction or astringency.
- d) Will help organize scattered mental patterns.

## 6) *Liver Functions*

- a) There are four main aspects of the free-flowing function of the *Liver*:
  - i) Nourishment of tissues
    - (1) *Liver* stores and releases Blood (similar to our Western physiological understanding).
    - (2) Blood nourishes tissues such as tendons, muscles, joints, brain and bone marrow, etc.
    - (3) *Liver* disharmony may result in tendonitis, sudden or moving pains, tremors, spasms, even itching.
  - ii) Harmony of emotions
    - (1) Smooth and even flow of Qi and Blood, since *Liver* stores and releases Blood
    - (2) *Liver* disharmony will result in emotional lability or instability and result in emotions such as anger, frustration, resentment, mood swings, anxiety or irritability (especially with PMS). This disharmony is sometimes seen as a red face and eyes, headaches/migraines, or hypertension.
  - iii) Harmony of digestion
    - (1) Function of *GB* (and *Liver*) to store and secrete bile
    - (2) *Liver/GB* disharmony may result in GB attacks
  - iv) Harmony of menstruation
    - (1) Since *Liver* stores and releases Blood
    - (2) *Liver* disharmony may result as menstrual cramping or many other menstrual disorders

## 7) *Sour and Liver Foods*

### a) **Fruit**

#### i) *Sour Citrus*

##### (1) **Lemon/Lime**

- (a) Clears Toxins
  - (i) Anti-bacterial
  - (ii) Gargle with lemon and water to help a sore throat or early cough
- (b) Benefits *Liver*
  - (i) Regulates *Liver* Qi (especially Lime)
- (c) Regulates GB, Stimulates Bile
  - (i) Add lemon juice to water when you drink it (squeeze a half lemon). Best to stimulate bile when drank on an empty stomach first thing in the morning. This helps to get the digestive juices flowing.
    1. Contraindications: Some will be concerned about lemon juice wearing down the enamel on your teeth - you are not consuming enough of it to really matter in this regard - unless you already have enamel erosion, or have health conditions which can lead to it such as GERD/heartburn, frequent vomiting such as in bulimia, xerostomia (dry mouth caused by medications or other conditions), etc.
- (d) Notes: General Contraindications - those with heartburn/GERD or high stomach acid or ulcers since lemons and limes are high in citric acid.

##### (2) **Grapefruit**

- (a) Benefits *Liver*
  - (i) Aids alcohol intoxication

- (b) Notes: Grapefruit, especially grapefruit juice, is now known to potentially interact with many pharmaceutical drugs. This interaction is in the intestines and not in the liver.

### **(3) Kumquats**

- (a) Another *sour* citrus with the same energetics to affect the *Liver*.
- (b) Eaten whole, the outer sweet peel offsets the *sour* citrus inside, but it still may be puckering to the taste buds of a neophyte.

## **ii) Other Fruit**

### **(1) Goji Berries**

Goji berries, or Lycium fruit, (known in TCM as Gou Qi Zi) is one slightly *sour* fruit that has become popular in the last few years. It has been the in Chinese Materia Medica since 500 AD. (We also use the bark of this plant in TCM as well.)

- (a) Strengthens *Liver*
  - (i) Regenerates liver cells and inhibits fat cells in the liver
    - 1. Research has now shown that this fruit is hepatoprotective (a liver protector). It has a very high ORAC value, an antioxidant measurement.
- (b) Brightens the Eyes
  - (i) High in the nutrients beta-carotene and zeaxanthin, both known to support vision health.
- (c) Blood Tonic (a Tonic strengthens or tonifies)

Will strengthen, nourish or ‘Build the Blood’ (a ‘Blood Builder’). Besides treating anemia, it can help many health conditions as diverse as weak lower back and knees, premature gray hair, diabetes, night sweats, infertility and chronic dry cough. Research now shows high in immune-stimulating polysaccharides.
- (d) Notes: Available now fresh and moist, so can be eaten in a variety of ways and is a nice addition to many dishes. Traditionally available in TCM as a dried fruit, so used in medicinal cooking in soups or congees (traditional rice porridge), or in a tea. See attached “Anti-Aging Brain Mix”.<sup>2</sup>

### **(2) Raspberry**

- (a) Strengthens *Liver*
  - (i) Detoxifies
    - 1. Now known to be full of anti-oxidants such as ellagic acid, which inhibits binding of certain carcinogens to DNA and is potentially anti-cancer. Ellagic acid is also high in pomegranates (another sour fruit).
  - (ii) Regulates the menstrual cycle
    - 1. Now known to have an estrogen-like effect.
    - 2. In TCM herbal medicine, both the dried unripe berries and leaves are used for menstrual disorders.
- (b) Brightens Eyes
  - (i) Good for vision
    - 1. Has flavonoids called anthocyanins.
- (c) Note: See attached recipe “Raspberry-Lime Aqua Fresca”.<sup>3</sup>

### **(3) Sour Plum**

- (a) Soothes *Liver Qi*
  - (i) Will treat emotional repression, pain, nervous disorders, and anxiety (especially purple plums).
- (b) Benefits *Liver*
  - (i) Will treat liver cirrhosis and diabetes.

#### (4) *Sour Apple*

- (a) Detoxifies *Liver*, Cleanses the Blood
  - (i) Removes toxic metals such as lead and mercury
- (b) Benefits the Eyes
  - (i) Can be used for eye inflammation (can use as a poultice)
- (c) Benefits the *GB*
  - (i) Pectin removes cholesterol, softens gallstones
- (d) Notes: See attached handout “Natural Treatments for Gallbladder Attack”. *Sour* green apples are best for the *GB*!

#### b) **Fermented Foods**

Some of you following current dietary or nutrition trends will have noticed the 'fermentation craze' of the past few years, which is hopefully most of you! Eating fermented foods, many of which are *sour* from being 'pickled', is consistent with the *sour* flavor helping digestion. Fermented foods are known to aid in digestion because they are full of both enzymes and probiotics, renewing intestinal flora, and from the TCM perspective, are therefore easier to digest since they are 'pre-digested'. Probiotics also inhibit pathogens and promote immunity. Fermenting your own foods may not be for all of us, but more options are becoming available in supermarkets. But for those of you inclined to ferment your own food, the current cultural classic is The Art of Fermentation, by Sandor Ellix Katz.

##### i) **Yogurt (or Kefir)**

Yogurt (or kefir) is a fermented *sour* food as well. If one can tolerate milk and if it is appropriate for your constitution or current diagnosis, yogurt is actually very nourishing and medicinal. Keep in mind that yogurt can also be made from substitute 'milks' too (like coconut, almond and soy). Yogurt is also very easy to make fresh. The ideal is to make it yourself from raw milk, but most will have to use organic milk instead. (Easy Yogurt in Crockpot recipe attached). However, plain organic yogurt is readily available at most supermarkets - yes, always get just plain yogurt - remember, the *sour* taste is what you need and you can add your own sweetness to balance the *sour* if desired (no dyes or high-fructose corn syrup like store-bought). Keep in mind that it is now known that whole milk is digested better than lower fat versions (references available, on request). Yogurt can be highly versatile as well. Add anything to yogurt that you like - fruit, fresh or dried (including fruits like coconut, mango or figs), raw nuts, hemp or chia seeds, even organic grains such as gluten-free oats. Since yogurt has a cooling nature also, it will offset the spiciness of Mexican or Indian food quite nicely too.

##### Recipe: Yogurt and Lime Fruitcup

Here's one simple great sour and sweet combo: Mix some lime juice, lime zest and honey to yogurt. Cut up some fruit such as apples or melon, add some berries and/or grapes, or other fruit you like and you have a nice refreshing and cooling dessert (best for a warm Spring day since this combination is very cold energetically). *Sour* and sweet such as this can be a great balancer for the

digestion. Modify this recipe to just yogurt with apples, raspberries and lime will be a great combination for the cooling the *Liver*!

## ii) Sauerkraut

### (1) Benefits Digestion

(a) Full of probiotics

### (2) Detoxifies

(a) High phytonutrient content with anti-cancer benefits (entire cabbage family)

### (3) Boosts Immunity

(a) High in vitamins and minerals (entire cabbage family)

### (4) Note: See attached recipe “Sauerkraut”.<sup>4</sup>

## iii) Apple Cider Vinegar

A simple way to add the *sour* energy of fermentation to your diet is to incorporate vinegars to your cooking and salads. Best unpasteurized and unrefined (found also in brown rice and rice wine vinegars).

### (1) Soothes *Liver* Qi

(a) Helps calm *Liver* emotions, especially in children

(b) Use 1 tsp per cup of water, adding honey (if heat symptoms, use lemon or lime instead).

### (2) Detoxifies *Liver*

## c) Vegetables

### i) Greens

In general, young spring greens have a natural bitterness (some are *bitter* and *sour*) that stimulates bile which aids in digestion of fats and proteins, so why they benefit the *Liver* and *GB*. They are high in vitamin, mineral and fiber content. Additionally, all dark, green leafy vegetables will rejuvenate the Blood and cleanse the *Liver*. They are high in chlorophyll and are strong ‘Blood Builders’ (chlorophyll is the ‘Blood of plants’ and is very similar to our Blood – has magnesium vs. iron). My motto is “Think Chlorophyll’ to build the Blood! They are also high in Vitamin K, which is bone-building as well.

### (1) Dandelion Greens

Actually more *bitter* than *sour*, but a very powerful medicinal plant for the *Liver*. It could be called a “super-weed”! Dandelion greens or leaves are used in other herbal traditions as well, including the root and flowers both (i.e., all are medicinal and edible). Fresh dandelion greens can now be found at local supermarkets and can be easily incorporated into your diet in salads, soups and smoothies. (It does have a bitter taste, so the easiest way to get used to the flavor is to add a small amount to dishes you already eat.)

#### (a) Benefits and Detoxifies the *Liver*

(i) Will treat any physical liver problem, including hepatitis and cirrhosis.

(ii) Stimulates secretion of bile

1. Dissolves GB stones (and Kidney stones)

2. Assists digestion and elimination

#### (b) Eliminates Toxins, Cleanses the Blood

(i) Anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-cancer

1. Treats both internal and external infections

- a. External: skin rashes, especially red/fiery, toxic swellings or abscesses, including measles, chicken pox, eczema, poison oak
  - b. Internal: Intestinal infections, upper respiratory infections (tonsillitis, sore throat), UTIs, etc.
- (ii) One of the active ingredients in infamous Chinese herbal medicine tea or ‘chong ji’:
1. *Ban Lan Gen Chong Ji* – useful for any infections, but especially great for sore throats or beginning of a common cold or flu.
- (c) Benefits the Breast
- (i) The *Liver* channel or meridian goes to the breast
  - (ii) Breast infections, abscesses or lumps, especially those with redness or pain
  - (iii) Will help treat breast cancer also
- (d) Regulates Blood Glucose
- (i) Contains the polysaccharide inulin
- (e) Notes:
- (i) Properties: More bitter than sour, less bitterness when leaves are young
  - (ii) Traditionally eaten fresh in Europe with olive oil and lemon (a great *Liver* combo!)
  - (iii) Note: See attached recipe “Dandelion Flower Syrup”.<sup>5</sup>
  - (iv) Great book on Dandelion: See *Dandelion Medicine*, Reference (30) for more recipes.

## (2) Watercress

Now becoming more widely available in supermarkets, this is a nutrient powerhouse! Also becoming widely used in supplement/herbal medicinal formulas (I predict it will become the next big fad in supplementation).

- (a) Detoxifies *Liver*
  - (i) Traditional detoxifier of the liver; now known to contain strong anticancer agents, helping in two stages of cell detoxification and renders carcinogens harmless.<sup>6</sup>
- (b) Note: See attached recipe “Stir-fried Watercress with Almonds and Ginger”.<sup>7</sup>

## (3) Arugula

Another *bitter* salad green widely available now; full of both vitamins and minerals.

## (4) Endive

- (a) Strengthens *Liver* and *GB*
  - (i) Helps digest fats
- (b) Detoxifies *Liver*

## ii) Other Vegetables

### (1) Artichoke

Artichoke has strong antioxidant properties and contains silymarin, a bioflavonoid, which research has shown may be helpful against liver toxicity and cancer.<sup>8</sup> Silymarin is considered the most active ingredient of milk thistle, which is used in both Western and Chinese herbal medicine for the *Liver*. Artichoke is also a member of the thistle family. Silymarin can increase the quantity of glutathione, which is a powerful liver protector. Silymarin also helps with the digestion of fats, stimulating bile and therefore reducing the risk of gallstones. Silymarin also promotes the generation of new liver cells and is used to treat hepatitis, liver damage due to alcoholism and poisoning from mushrooms. Artichoke itself has hypoglycemic effects, as well as reducing cholesterol and ameliorating indigestion and irritable bowel syndrome.<sup>9,10</sup>

### iii) Edible Herbs

#### (1) Peppermint

- (a) Soothes *Liver Qi*
  - (i) Treats tightness in the chest or flanks (especially due to stress), emotional instability or menstrual disorders.
  - (ii) Anti-spasmodic: IBS, dysmenorrhea (painful menses/cramping).
  - (iii) In Xiao Yao Wan, an infamous TCM PMS formula.
- (b) Clears the Head, Brightens the Eyes and Benefits the Throat
  - (i) Anti-bacterial: has a floating, upward quality, so used to treat upper respiratory infections especially. Has a cooling nature, so used for common colds and flues that have heat symptoms (for example, sore throat and fever.)
  - (ii) In Yin Qiao San, an infamous formula for upper respiratory infections with symptoms noted above.
- (c) Disperses Turbid Qi from the Abdomen
  - (i) For gastrointestinal disorders characterized with abdominal pain or cramping, nausea and vomiting, especially due to ‘Damp-Heat’ symptoms (again, due to its cooling nature).
  - (ii) One of the ingredients in another infamous Curing Pills for ‘curing’ digestive complaints of all kinds).
- (d) Notes: Since peppermint has a cooling nature, it is a great cooling drink for hot summer months (make into an ice tea – add honey and set out in the sun to ‘cook’; add ice later). See also attached recipe for a “Mint Syrup”<sup>11</sup> (which could be used to add to other herbal teas or desserts.)

#### (2) Hibiscus Flowers

The dried flowers are traditionally used in Mexico (called Jamaica, pronounced (pronounced hi-my-ka) and other Latin American countries as a cooling, sour summer drink (not used in TCM). It is consumed in African countries and a few Asian countries as well. It is high in bioflavonoids, Vitamin C and antioxidants. Modern research has shown it may benefit mild hypertension, has anti-inflammatory properties and also reduces cholesterol (*Liver/GB?*). Has the same bioflavonoids as raspberries, so should also benefit the vision (*Liver* also?). See attached recipe: “Rose Hips Lemonade” (includes both rose hips and hibiscus).<sup>12</sup>

#### (3) Lemon Balm

An herb that is sour and spicy both. Use as an herbal tea or when a mild lemon flavor desired in a salad or other dish.

- (a) Soothes *Liver Qi*
  - (i) Calms the Nerves
    - 1. Used in many herbal remedies for anxiety, insomnia and even depression.
- (b) Detoxifies
  - (i) Anti-viral, especially for Herpes (all types). Used both internally and externally.



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<sup>1</sup> *Healing with the Herbs of Life*, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> From *Second Spring*, by Dr. Maoshing Ni, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> *Isabel's Cantina: Bold Latin Flavors from the new California Kitchen*, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Real Food, All Year: Eating Seasonal Whole Foods for Optimal Health & All-Day Energy*, p.48.

<sup>5</sup> *Dandelion Medicine*, p.65.

<sup>6</sup> *The Top 100 Health Tips*, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *The Top 100 Health Tips*, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Secrets of Longevity*, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> *The Top 100 Health Tips*, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Real Food, All Year: Eating Seasonal Whole Foods for Optimal Health & All-Day Energy*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> *Mint*, by Kate Ferry-Swainson, *Mint Syrup*, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> *Wise Concoctions: natural elixirs and tonics for health and energy*, p. 72.