

This is an excerpt from Chinese Nutrition Therapy by Joerg Kastner for background for the Chi Food Therapy Lab

## Traditional Chinese Nutrition Theory

The beginnings of Chinese dietetics can be traced back to the *Zhou* Dynasty (1100–700 BC). At the time, four groups of healers were responsible for providing medical care:

- Therapists for nutritional matters (dietitians): *shi yi*
- Therapists for internal diseases (internists): *ji yi*
- Therapists for external illnesses and injuries (surgeons): *yang yi*
- Therapists for sick animals (veterinarians): *shou yi*

Dietitians were the most significant of these healers. Their task was primarily the prevention of disease in their patients, along with therapeutic use of diet for acute and chronic diseases.

The root of the term “diet” reveals an interesting connection between the original Western perception of the term and the Asian concept.

Diet is derived from the Greek term “*diaita*,” meaning life care, lifestyle, or way of life. Lifestyle highlights an aspect that resembles “*Tao*,” the connection of humans and nature.

With its emphasis on prevention, dietary therapy in TCM enabled dietitians to be solely responsible for the health care of entire families of

dignitaries. Health was achieved through diet.

Prevention, the avoidance of diseases, plays an important role in all TCM therapies. The value placed on prevention is illustrated by an ancient Chinese system of wages for physicians (this may be an anecdote!).

The amount of a physician's annual salary was determined by the immaculate state of health displayed by their patients. The less their patients fell sick, the higher their salary.

Acupuncture, moxibustion, phytotherapy, dietetics, and exercise (*qi gong, tai chi*) are the foundations of therapy in TCM.

Even in its origins, dietetics was assigned a vital role in the treatment of disease. To quote from the *Su Wen*:

*“When the body is too weak, the therapist should use foods to replenish the deficit.”*

The famous physician *Sun Si Miao* of the *Tang* Dynasty (AD 618—907) further emphasized the important role of dietary therapy:

*“Dietary therapy should be the first step when one treats a disease. Only when this is unsuccessful should one try medicines.”*

In a further quote, he emphasizes the preventive character of Chinese dietetics:

*“Without the knowledge of proper diet, it is hardly possible to enjoy good health.”*

Nutritional therapy offers the following options:

- “Life care”—Tao
- Prevention of disease
- Therapy for acute disease
- Therapy for chronic disease

# The *Qi* Energy Concept of TCM

*Qi*, the life force, or life energy, is of primary importance in TCM.

Sufficient and freely coursing *qi* signifies vitality, health, and the body's capacities. *Qi* vacuity lowers overall quality of life and encourages development of disease.

The body gathers its daily energy from three sources.

## The Three Energy Sources

- Congenital constitution essence (*jing*)
- *Gu qi* (drum *qi*) from food
- Ancestral (air) *qi* (*zong qi*)

## Congenital Constitution Essence (*Jing*)

The inherited essence of the parents, stored in the kidneys, provides the basis for all life processes and maturation processes in the body. Quantity and quality of *jing* are determined at birth. Since this energy reserve can not be replenished, Chinese physicians recommend careful management of this potential. As little *jing* as possible should be used to meet one's daily energy requirement. **Note:** Dissipated, excessive lifestyles, an overactive sex life, hard drugs, extreme stress or strain, and fasting diminish and weaken *jing*.

## *Gu Qi* (Drum *Qi*, or Food *Qi*)

*Gu qi* develops during the first transformation stage as stomach and spleen process ingested foods. The quality of newly formed *gu qi* depends on the purity of foods ingested (if possible, fresh and not processed or denatured) and on the condition of the digestive organs stomach and spleen. If these organs are in a chronic or acute state of fatigue, quantity and quality of *gu qi* are reduced. This gradually leads to general debility with a tendency

to chronic vacuity symptoms.

Since *gu qi* is a renewable energy source, it plays a key role in Chinese medicine. *Gu qi* makes up the biggest share of the renewable energies. This role was emphasized by the traditional “School of the Middle,” which viewed nutritional therapy as a key element in the treatment of diseases.

*“Without knowledge about proper diet, it is hardly possible to enjoy good health.”*

## **Ancestral (Air) Qi (Zong Qi)**

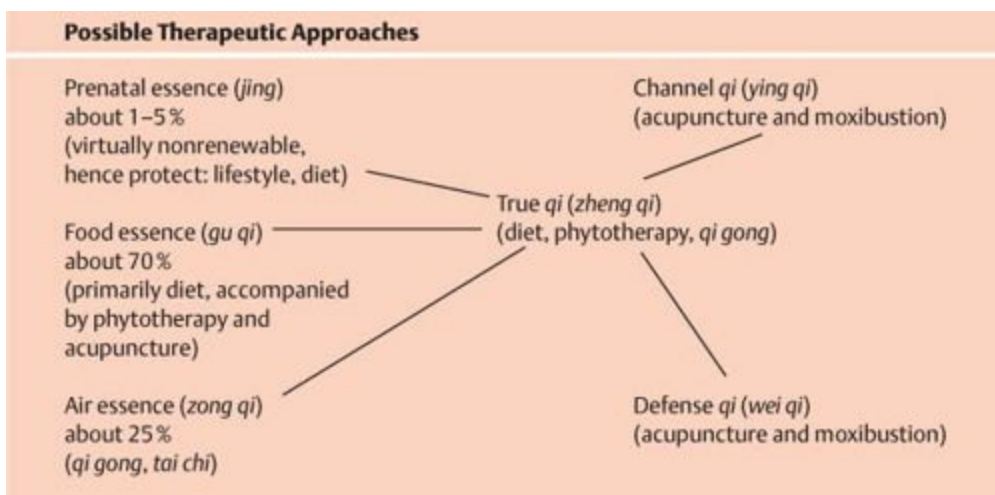
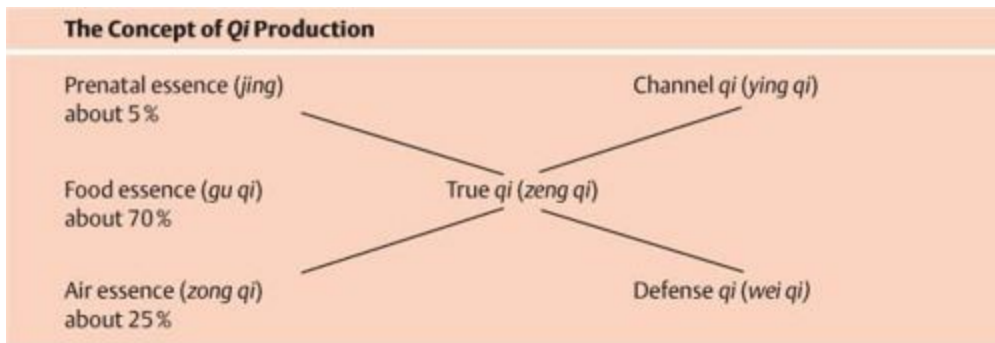
With each breath, ancestral *qi* contributes to the total energy of the body, making up about one third of the total renewable energy. Proper breathing and good, clean air enhance its energetic quality. Ancient Chinese techniques can contribute to an increase in ancestral *qi* through specific breathing exercises, such as *qi gong* or *tai chi*, or exercises from the Asian martial arts.

*The three energy sources congenital essence (jing), gu qi (drum qi), and ancestral qi (zong qi) merge into true qi (zhen qi), which flows through the body in channels as construction qi (ying qi) and defense qi (wei qi).*

These basic concepts highlight the need for TCM therapy to encompass several complementary therapeutic principles.

Acupuncture especially influences true *qi* (*zhen qi*). However, acupuncture, with the exception of moxibustion, does not supplement *qi* in a patient: instead it moves *qi*, balances it, and disperses stagnation.

**Tip:** Before employing acupuncture treatment for *qi*, *yang*, or *yin* vacuity, please note that *qi* vacuity or *yang* vacuity require expanded treatment modalities involving dietary measures and Chinese herbs to supplement *qi*, *yang*, body fluids, and blood. Successful treatment of *yin* vacuity requires replenishing the physical body and its substance with dietary and herbal therapy. These build the foundation for effective acupuncture treatment.



## Function of the Triple Burner (*San Jiao*)

In TCM, the triple burner (*san jiao*) is likened to the “official responsible for irrigation and control of waterways” in a feudal state.

The *Nei Jing* describes the triple burner's main task as the creation, transformation, and movement of body fluids (*jin ye*), with an emphasis on digestion and excretion.

The triple burner coordinates distribution and movement of the 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 edemas and urinary retention.

In Western perception, the triple burner reflects the anatomical division of the body into three parts, described in historic texts such as the *Nan Jing* (The Classic of Difficult Issues) and the *Ling Shu* (second part of the *Huang Di Nei Jing: The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*).

**The Upper Burner: Heart, lungs, pericardium, upward from diaphragm**

The lungs unite ancestral *qi* (*zong qi*) with *gu qi* (drum *qi*) to form true *qi* (*zhen qi*), which flows in the channels, and distribute true *qi* through the body. Lungs and heart use *qi* to “breathe life” into the blood (*xue*) of the upper burner. The lungs disperse fluids as a “fine mist” that moistens skin and muscles. The upper burner controls upward movement and defense *qi*.

**The Center Burner: Spleen, pancreas, stomach, between diaphragm and navel**

In classic texts, the center burner is often compared to a boiling kettle, or a fermentation barrel that absorbs food as “foam” and processes it. Stomach and spleen are responsible for proper transformation and transport of food. This process separates “clear” (*qing*) from “turbid” (*zhuo*). The spleen moves clear *qi* into the upper burner. Turbid *qi* is sent downward through the stomach. Once food has been transformed, the flow of essential *qi* (*jing qi*) derived from clear food is directed upward, toward lung and heart.

This system provides the body with the main share of renewable *qi* as well as with blood (*xue*) and body fluids (*jin ye*), which are moved along from there. The center burner is central to Chinese nutrition: An appropriate and sufficient diet strengthens spleen *qi* daily and protects the energy resources of the kidney network.

The quality of food provided to the center burner determines the body's entire energy store, as well as quality and quantity of blood and body fluids.

**The Lower Burner: Liver, kidney, bladder, and intestine, downward from navel**

The lower burner is usually described as a “swamp” or “sewer.” Its main

function is the transformation and excretion of fluids and waste products. The flow of *qi* is directed downward.

## **B Methodology of Nutritional Therapy**

### **Energetics of Food**

Western nutrition theory focuses on the analytical and quantitative categorization of foods. This categorization is based on material food components such as carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, minerals, and trace elements.

The Eastern view, on the other hand, follows the qualitative, holistic concept of *yin* and *yang* and illustrates how thermal nature and flavor of foods and medicinal herbs influence the body.

Hippocrates and Hildegard von Bingen employed similar qualitative, more energetically oriented approaches. They used diet as an important and inexpensive source of therapy for sustaining health and treating disease.

TCM makes a close connection between foods and medicinal herbs for therapy, since their classification follows the same criteria. Foods and herbs can both promote and impede each other in their effect on the body. For example, it would be pointless to prescribe phlegm-reducing herbs and acupuncture to patients without informing them about phlegm-producing foods such as fatty foods, “junk food,” excess dairy products, alcohol, etc. Effective “holistic” therapy in such cases needs to include dietary measures, for example phlegm-reducing foods such as pears.

#### **Four basic criteria for energetic classification of foods**

- **Thermal nature:** Hot, warm, neutral, cool, cold
- **Flavor:** Sweet, acrid, sour, bitter, salty
- **Organ network:** Spleen, stomach, lung, large intestine, kidney,

bladder, liver, gallbladder, heart, small intestine

- **Direction of movement:** Upbearing, floating, downbearing, falling

*In the classic “Recipes Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold” (quian jin fang), the famous Chinese physician Sun Si Miao states: “For the body to retain its balance and harmony requires only following a proper diet. One should never take medications in an uncontrolled manner. The power of medications is one-sided, and there are cases in which they are helpful.”*

Energetic classification assigns foods primarily to four areas: thermal nature, flavor, organ network, and direction of movement. These are modeled after paradigms rooted in the empirical foundations of TCM.

**Tip:** Thermal nature and flavor are of principal value in Chinese nutritional therapy. Flavor and thermal nature are often combined to describe a flavor and its effect on the body, e.g., sweet–hot or sour–cool.

*General preventive nutrition can focus on only the thermal nature or flavor of foods. Nutritional therapy designed to heal illness, however, needs to be based on a firm diagnosis by a TCM practitioner and consider all four criteria (thermal nature, flavor, organ network, and direction).*

## Energetic Thermal Nature

Foods are divided into five energetic temperature levels:

**Hot, warm = yang**

**Cold, cool = yin**

**Neutral**



Foods and their Thermal Nature					
Food category	Hot	Warm	Neutral	Cold	Cool
<i>Beverages</i>	Alcohol (high-proof) Yogi tea	Cocoa Coffee Red wine		Water	Black tea Fruit juices Peppermint tea Sour milk Soy milk Wheat beer
<i>Condiments and sweeteners</i>			Honey	Salt Soy sauce	
<i>Dairy products</i>		Butter Goat's cheese	Cow's milk cheese		Yogurt
<i>Eggs, fish, fowl, meat, etc.</i>	Lamb	Beef Chicken Eel Salmon	Carp Duck Chicken egg Goose Pork	Shrimp Crayfish	Rabbit
<i>Fruit and vegetables</i>		Cherry Fennel Leek Peach Onion	Carrot Cauliflower Grape Fig Plum Potato	Asparagus Banana Orange Rhubarb Seaweed Tomato Watermelon	Celery Cucumber Soy bean Sprouts Spinach Zucchini
<i>Grains and legumes</i>			Corn Lentil Millet Peas Rice Spelt		Barley Tofu Wheat
<i>Herbs and spices</i>	Cinnamon Chili Curry Garlic Ginger Paprika Pepper	Anise Basil Rosemary		Dandelion Yellow gentian	Tarragon
<i>Seeds and nuts</i>		Walnut	Hazelnut		

This same classification is applied to Chinese medicinal herbs and is rooted in a 3000-year tradition of Chinese medicine based on application, observation, experience, and intuition.

Independent of its preparation, every food has a “natural” energetic, basic thermal nature that has a specific effect on the body.

### Example

Energetically “hot” foods such as pepper, chili, and garlic have a heating, warming effect on the body. “Cold” foods such as tomatoes and bananas cool

the body. Warm and cool foods have a milder effect on the body. Neutral foods do not change the energetic level of the body.

Thermal quality initially has a general effect on the body: it cools or warms it. Flavor and association with one of the five phases determine the food's effect on a particular organ or network.

### **Example**

The sweet flavor is associated with the earth phase and primarily influences the corresponding organs stomach and spleen. It has a warming or cooling effect on stomach/spleen, depending on thermal nature: Fennel tea warms the stomach, while bananas have a cooling effect.


## **Hot**

Hot foods increase *yang*, speed up *qi*, activate, warm, disperse, move upward and outward, warm the bowels and viscera (*zang fu*), eliminate external and internal cold, and mobilize defense energy.

### **Example**

“Treatment of cold symptoms”:

➤ Ginger, cinnamon, lamb, chili

 Excess creates heat (*yang* repletion), injures *yin*, and dries out body fluids.

## **Warm**

Warm foods strengthen *yang* and *qi*, warm the body, bowels and viscera (*zang fu*), and warm and strengthen the center burner.

### **Example**

“Treatment of cold symptoms”:

- Fennel, chicken, beef, oats



Excess creates *yang* repletion.

## Neutral

Neutral foods build up *qi* and body fluids, and stabilize and harmonize the body.

### Example

“Treatment of *qi* vacuity”:

- Honey, rice, potatoes

## Cool

Cool foods supplement body fluids (*jin ye*) and blood (*xue*), slow down *qi*, and clear heat.

### Example

“Treatment of heat symptoms”:

- Yogurt, soy milk, wheat

## Cold

Cold foods create cold, cool internal heat, and have a calming effect on the spirit (*shen*).

### Example

“Treatment of heat symptoms”:

- Watermelon, dandelion, orange



Excess damages *qi* and *yang*, and thoroughly cools down the body.

Therapeutic goals are derived from the *yin – yang* principle. The *Nei Jing* states:

*“If something is cold, heat it. If something is hot, cool it.” Supplementing the opposite polarity restores original balance.*

*Cold requires warmth*  
*= yang (hot and warm)*  
*Heat requires cold*  
*= yin (cold and cool)*

## **“Yang Foods”**

“Yang foods” are hot or warm foods; they warm and invigorate the body.

*Acrid spices (pepper, garlic, cinnamon)*  
*Meat (beef, chicken, game/venison, lamb)*  
*Coffee*  
*Alcohol*  
*Oats*  
*Cherry, peach*

*Yang* foods are recommended for disorders of a cool or cold nature, for example:

## ***Qi* Vacuity**

### **Symptoms**

Fatigue, pale complexion, shivering, loss of appetite, susceptibility to infection.

## ***Yang Vacuity***

### **Symptoms**

Cold dominates, chronic cold hands and feet, exhaustion, lethargy, sloppy stool, frequent urge to urinate with pale urine.

## ***“Yin Foods”***

*Yin* foods are cool or cold foods; they have a cooling, soothing effect on the body.

*Dairy products*

*Fruit (especially tropical fruit like banana, citrus fruit)*

*Mineral water*

*Tomato*

*Wheat*

*Yin* foods are important therapy for heat disorders, for example:

## ***Yin Vacuity***

### **Symptoms**

Dry mucous membranes, dry tongue, night sweat, hot hands and feet, feeling hot in the afternoon.

## ***Yang Repletion***

### Symptoms

Loud voice, red face, restlessness, hectic, hyperactive, sleep disorders, feeling hot.

### Example



### Practical Application

**Patient is lethargic, pale, tired, shivering.**

*Diagnosis:* Yang vacuity

*Therapy:* Replenish *yang* with *yang* foods (energetically hot or warm foods like lamb, beef, pepper, fennel tea).

**Patient is agitated, irritable, with red complexion and sudden headaches.**

*Diagnosis:* Yang repletion.

*Therapy:* Drain *yang* repletion, clear heat with *yin* foods (energetically cool or cold foods like fruits, salad, peppermint tea, tomato).

## The Five Flavors (*Wu Wei*)

Sweet—acrid—salty—sour—bitter

### Organization of Flavors into *Yin*, *Yang*, and Organ Network

Yang quality	Phase	Network
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Sweet Acrid	Earth Metal	Spleen/stomach Lung/large intestine
<b>Yin quality</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Network</b>
Bitter Salty Sour	Fire Water Wood	Heart/small intestine Kidney/bladder Liver/gallbladder

Food Classification According to Flavor				
Sweet	Acrid	Salty	Sour	Bitter
Almond	Celeriac (celery root)	Crayfish	Adzuki beans	Basil
Apple	Chili	Duck	Apple	Chicory
Anise	Cinnamon	Ham	Apricot	Celeriac (celery root)
Barley	Fennel	Oyster	Grape	Coffee
Banana	Garlic	Octopus	Kiwi	Dandelion
Beef	Ginger	Pork	Lemon	Lettuce
Butter	Kohlrabi	Pigeon	Mango	Parsley
Carrot	Onion	Salt	Orange	Tea
Cheese	Paprika	Soy sauce	Plum	Tobacco
Chicken	Pepper		Pineapple	
Corn	Radishes		Cheese	
Duck	Thyme		Curd cheese	
Eggplant	Watercress		Farmer's cheese	
Fennel			Cream cheese	
Fig			Sour (curdled) milk	
Milk			Tomato	
Millet				
Oats				
Pork				
Potato				
Pumpkin				
Pear				
Rabbit				
Rice				
Spinach				
Wheat				

The five flavors are the oldest system of food classification in TCM and are mentioned in the *Nei Jing*. Flavors can be divided according to their *yin* or *yang* quality.

<b>Yang</b>	<b>quality: Sweet, acrid</b>
<b>Yin</b>	<b>quality: Salty, sour, bitter</b>

In addition to their specific *yin/yang* effect, the five flavors each belong to one of the five phases. Thus each flavor is closely associated with the organ

network linked to the phase influenced by the flavor.

Phase	Network
Sweet	Spleen/stomach
Acrid	Lung/large intestine
Salty	Kidney/bladder
Sour	Liver/gallbladder
Bitter	Heart/small intestine

Each flavor also has other important qualities that influence the body:

## Sweet Flavor

### Phase

Earth

### Network

Spleen/stomach

### Effect

Warming, strengthening, harmonizing, relaxing, and moistening. Sweet has the strongest supplementing effect on the body (craving for “sweets” following heavy physical, emotional, or mental exertion).

### General Application

Sweet flavor strengthens primarily spleen *qi*, where it builds up energy. It also helps with acute weakness (ravishing appetite). With its moistening effect, sweet foods nourish body fluids, relieve inner tension (compulsive eating, overeating due to emotional stress), and stabilize one's “inner center” (earth phase).



⚠ Excess sweet flavors harm spleen *qi* and produce pathogenic dampness. This can, over time, lead to phlegm disorders, for example recurrent bronchitis, sinusitis, chronic fatigue, dull sensation in head. The *Nei Jing* says: “*Sweet flavor adds flesh,*” resulting in obesity and weakness of connective tissue. Via the controlling cycles, excess sweet flavor can weaken the kidneys, resulting in bone and teeth disorders.

## Acrid Flavor

### Phase

Metal

### Network

Lung/large intestine

### Effect

Moves *qi*, invigorates energy circulation, loosens stagnation, disperses, opens pores, frees surface of exogenous disease factors, and produces perspiration.

### General Application

The acrid flavor strengthens the lungs and banishes exogenous disease factors, especially wind–cold. Its sweat-producing effect and ability to open pores are helpful during the acute stage of a cold (ginger). Moderately spicy foods during the winter months offer excellent protection against colds. Due to their invigorating effect on *qi*, acrid flavors loosen emotional stagnation and associated breathing problems (tightness in chest). With its tendency to move *qi* upward, acrid flavors are beneficial when experiencing emotional strain, such as sadness, melancholy, and despondency (emotions of the lung network).

⚠ **People with heat symptoms should assiduously avoid acrid flavors!** Excess causes heat symptoms and can impair the skin (dryness, allergies,

itching skin, sun allergy). Through the controlling cycles, acrid flavors can damage mostly liver and gallbladder (ascendant liver *yang*, or *gan yang shang kang*, for example irritability, hyperactivity, sleep disorders.) Acrid flavors disperse spirit (*shen*), resulting in inner restlessness, hyperactivity, and sleep disorders. Via the engendering (*sheng*) cycle, kidney essence may overheat, causing exaggerated sexual desire, sexual compulsions. May weaken muscle tone and cause dryness in large intestine (constipation).

## **Salty Flavor**

### **Phase**

Water

### **Network**

Kidney/bladder

### **Effect**

Cools, moistens, downbears, softens, loosens

### **General Application**

Salty flavor in moderation supplements kidney function, promotes urine and stool excretion (Epsom salt), dissolves congestions and hardened areas (e.g., subcutaneous nodules, phlegm accumulation).

⚠ More salt restriction, excess is common! Dehydrates body; damages fluids, blood, and vascular system (hypertension); hardens muscles and damages bones. Via the restraining cycle (*ke*), inhibits heart and spirit (*shen*), decreases mental abilities, and leads to rigid thinking.

## **Sour Flavor**

### **Phase**

Wood

## **Network**

Liver/gallbladder

## **Effect**

Astringent, gathers and preserves fluids

## **General Application**

Sour-cooling foods refresh the body, reduce excessive perspiration, promote the creation of fluids, and soothe “heated” temperaments by cooling emotional “heat” in the liver/gallbladder. Sour flavor also supplements *yin*. “Sour makes happy.” In times of emotional stress and anger, the sour flavor should be favored, because it supplements liver *yin*. The supplementing effect of sour flavors is moved along to the heart element (via the engendering *sheng* cycle).

Sour moves inward and is healing for distracted, unfocused minds or restless lifestyles.

⚠ Sour flavor is contraindicated when acute external weather conditions (wind-cold) impact the body. When pathogenic effects are still located in the outer layers of the body, sour flavors pull these factors into deeper layers. This worsens the course of disease and reduces treatment success (no heated lemon juice during acute cold!). The therapy of choice for colds is acrid flavors, which open pores, promote perspiration, and clear pathogenic factors from the body surface.

Excess sour flavors damage muscle tone (lowering pH > sore muscles, muscle contraction) and sinews and should be avoided when suffering from nonarticular rheumatism and arthritis.

## **Bitter Flavor**

### **Phase**

Fire

### **Network**

Heart/small intestine

### **Effect**

Drying, hardening, downbearing

### **General Application**

Bitter–cool, downbears and supports the body's digestive and excretion functions (digestive teas with amaroids/bitters, such as gallbladder tea, wormwood tea). It supplements heart *yin* and has a calming effect, especially following stress and mental strain (beer, especially light-colored wheat beer). Bitter–warm flavors in the form of aperitifs, or bitter liqueurs, stimulate the digestive organs due to their alcohol content, especially in combination with bitter flavors.

Engendering (*sheng*) cycle: Bitter (fire) supplements spleen/pancreas and stomach (earth). Its drying property prevents the formation of damp throughout the body. When taken in appropriate dosages, bitter is a spleen *qi* tonic, preferably during moist–cool weather (coffee, red wine).

⚠ Too much bitter–cool has a strong laxative effect and causes diarrhea (Epsom salt). Excess bitter–warm flavors (coffee!) dehydrate (dry skin), damage fluids (especially blood vacuity, poor circulation), damage texture (*Nei Jing*: “*Bitter spreads to the bones*”), heat up the heart, and inhibit spirit. In Western medicine, coffee is considered a “calcium robber” and promotes osteoporosis.

Via the engendering (*sheng*) cycle, surplus heat in the fire phase is moved into the earth phase, where it can cause damage to spleen/stomach.

A symptom often seen in practice is “stomach heat” (TCM), in Western medicine known as gastritis or ulcer, caused by excessive coffee consumption, nicotine, or stress (TCM: stress = heat).

**Tip:** Green tea is energetically “cool,” while black tea is more neutral in thermal nature.

## Flavor Association with Organ Networks

Along with their general effect, each of the five flavors is associated with one of the five phases. This explains the flavor's effect on the specific bowels and viscera (*zang fu*) of a corresponding phase. The *Nei Jing* states:

*“Sourness enters the liver, bitterness enters the heart, sweetness enters the spleen, acridity enters the lungs, saltiness enters the kidneys.” It goes on to say: “Sourness enters the sinews, bitterness enters the blood, acridity enters qi, sweetness enters the flesh, saltiness enters the bones.” (Huang Di Nei Ling Shui Zu Yi: The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine)*

Phase	Flavor	Organ
Earth	Sweet	Spleen/stomach
Metal	Acrid	Lung/large intestine
Water	Salty	Kidney/bladder
Wood	Sour	Liver/gallbladder
Fire	Bitter	Heart/small intestine

Food Table: Organ Networks					
<b>Viscera (zang organs)</b>	<b>Spleen</b>	<b>Lungs</b>	<b>Kidney</b>	<b>Liver</b>	<b>Heart</b>
	Anise Beef Caraway seed Carrots Chicken Fig Honey Millet Oats Pork Rice Salmon	Almond Duck Garlic Radish Pepper Peppermint tea Watercress	Chestnut Grape Lamb Millet Oats Oyster Plum Raspberry Venison Wheat Walnuts	Alcohol Celery stalks Eel Liver Garlic Lemon Peppermint tea Rye Wheat	Alcohol Black tea Chili Coffee Dandelion Gentian Wheat
<b>Bowels (fu organs)</b>	<b>Stomach</b>	<b>Large intestine</b>	<b>Bladder</b>	<b>Gallbladder</b>	<b>Small intestine</b>
	Beef Caraway seed Carrots Chamomile tea Chicken Corn Fennel Fig Honey Millet Pork Rice Trout	Banana Corn Pepper Rabbit Spinach Tofu Wheat germ	Caraway seed Fennel Parsley Squid	Belgian endive Mung bean Peach Rye	Green lettuce Mushroom Snail Spinach

*Note:* In each network, some food flavors can influence bowels and viscera (*zang fu*) in five thermal directions.

### Example

Sweet–cold, banana: Clears stomach heat

Sweet–warm, carrot: Warms stomach

Sweet–hot, anise schnapps: Warms, heats stomach

## Example: Carrot

### Flavor

Sweet

### Phase

Earth

**Thermal Nature**

Warm

**Network**

Stomach and spleen/stomach

**Effect**

Warms and strengthens primarily the digestive organs stomach and spleen/pancreas. Useful for loss of appetite, nausea, digestive stagnation, constipation, and diarrhea.

***Qi* Movement Caused by Food: Food Direction**

This quality describes how a food influences the movement of *qi* in the body.

**Upbearing Movement**

Foods that move *yang* upward mainly have sweet–acid flavors and moderate thermal nature (warm, neutral); recommended for use during spring season.

**Example**

Green onion, garlic, alcoholic beverages

**Floating Movement**

Moves *qi* upward and outward (sweating), expels external pathogenic factors, dissipates cold and wind; strong (warm/hot) thermal nature, sweet and acid flavor.

**Example**

Cinnamon, pepper, high-proof alcoholic beverages

**Downbearing Movement**

Moves *qi* downward and inward, retains *qi* and body fluids on the inside; cooling–neutral thermal nature, primarily sour flavor, partly bitter and salty. For example, downbearing ascending liver *yang* with dizziness, headaches.

**Example**

Yogurt, lemon

**Falling Movement**

Moves downward, has a laxative or diuretic effect, and a cooling, mostly cold thermal nature, with strong salty or bitter flavor.

**Example**

Crayfish, Epsom salt

**Influencing the Thermal Nature of Foods**

Chinese dietetics recognizes over 50 different ways of preparing foods. The ways in which foods are heated or prepared exert the most significant influence on the *qi* or thermal nature of foods. Preparation methods can be divided into two categories.

**Cooling Cooking Methods**

These methods increase the cooling nature of foods. They can cool down



warm or hot foods by using refreshing or cold ingredients. Cooling cooking methods increase the *yin* potential of meals.

**Cooling cooking methods include:**

Blanching, steaming, salting (pickling in brine), boiling in plentiful water, and preparation using refreshing ingredients such as fruit, tropical fruit, or sprouts.

## **Warming Cooking Methods**

These methods support the warming effect of foods and reduce the refreshing (cooling) effect of foods. Warming cooking methods increase the *yang* potential of meals.

**Warming cooking methods include:**

Grilling, frying, roasting, smoking, searing, baking, long simmering in liquid, cooking with alcohol, using hot or warming spices.

## **Cooking Methods in Detail**

### **Baking $\Delta\Delta\nabla$**

This cooking method gently supplies *yang* energy to foods. It is useful for avoiding the cooling effect of refreshing or strongly cooling foods (*yin* foods, e.g., vegetables). Baking foods or making casseroles is a way for vegetarians to supply their body with *yang* energy and balance the cooling effect of the *yin* foods that make up the biggest share of a vegetarian diet. Baking is beneficial for supplying the body with *yang* energy during the cold season. Vegetables or raw foods, which due to their *yin* character cool the body, can become warming through baking. For example, baked tomatoes or baked

apples.

## **Blanching $\Delta \nabla$**

This method of preparation does not change the energy level of a food, but foods become easier to digest when heated.

## **Frying and Roasting $\Delta\Delta \nabla$**

Frying and roasting supply foods with *yang* energy. A good variation of this method in Chinese cooking is the use of a wok with little or no oil added. “Woking” brings foods in contact with extreme heat for a short time only and lends them an outer crunchy layer, but leaves them juicy and fresh on the inside. This provides foods with strong *yang* energy on the outside and a balancing *yin* component on the inside.

*Frying and roasting should be avoided with internal heat symptoms. Using too much oil or other frying fats can also develop moist heat, which strains the liver/gallbladder organ network.*

## **Steaming $\Delta \nabla$**

Steaming changes the thermal nature of foods very little, which classifies this method as neutral.

## **Grilling/Broiling/Barbecue $\Delta\Delta\Delta\Delta$**

Grilling, broiling, or barbecuing develops a strong *yang* effect. Direct

contact with a heat source supplies foods with intense heat. This develops a strong warming effect in grilled foods, especially meat. Because grilling, broiling, or barbecuing may develop toxic substances in foods, this method should be applied only in exceptional cases.

*Grilling broiling, or barbecuing should be avoided with heat symptoms.*

## **Boiling/Simmering $\Delta \nabla \rightarrow \Delta \Delta \nabla$**

With boiling, the warming effect is determined by cooking time and temperature. Brief boiling adds little *yang* energy to foods. Prolonged boiling over several hours (up to 36 hours for the Master Soup) develops immense *yang* potential in foods. In TCM, this heightened energy potential is much more important than any potential loss of vitamins during prolonged cooking. Stews containing warming meats and simmered for long periods are an excellent foundation for restoring *yang* potential in a person with *qi* or *yin* vacuity. Boiling is also valuable during cold winter months (meat, broths, and vegetable soups). This cooking method is no longer common in many parts of the world, but it is very effective for healing in Chinese medicine. In the past, boiling or simmering for long periods was widespread in Europe, especially in Northern Europe, where, for days on end, a pot would simmer over an open fire, with new food items added regularly. These energetically very warm meals provided the necessary balance for frequently cool weather conditions.

**Tip:** “The Master Soup”  $\Delta \Delta \Delta \nabla \nabla$

In Chinese nutrition, the energetics of a food are influenced by cooking duration and intensity of supplied heat. So-called Master Soups, which simmer over a low heat for between six and 36 hours, are of special significance here. These soups are believed by traditional practitioners of TCM to contain tremendous healing powers. In TCM, the Master Soup is used to treat general *qi* vacuity or *yang* vacuity, and is recommended

particularly after long, strenuous illnesses, during recovery, as well as following childbirth to boost strength in the new mother. Prolonged cooking increases the warming and strengthening effect of meat and bones.

Vegetarian stews experience more of an energetic devaluation as a result of extended cooking times. Warming spices should be used instead of prolonged cooking for vegetarian stews to increase the energetics of the meal.

### **Example**

Selection of specific ingredients can determine the effect on the organ network:

- Lentil stew with pork supplements the kidney network.
- Carrot stew with beef supplements the stomach/spleen network.

## **Cooking with Alcohol ΔΔ**

Alcohol not only enhances the flavor of foods, it also warms them. The movement pattern of alcohol is upbearing, which pulls *yang* upward. Alcohol also dissolves stagnation, promotes *qi* and blood circulation, and dissipates cold. This can balance *qi* vacuity in the upper burner. Cooking with alcohol warms the center burner (stomach and spleen) and the upper burner (heart and lung). During emotional strains with downbearing *qi*, such as dejection, resignation, or sadness, meals cooked with alcohol upbear *qi* and enhance mood. Cooking with alcohol warms meals, increases the body's energy, and stimulates *qi* circulation in the body, which can also loosen emotional blockage and tension.

## **Boiling with Plentiful Water ∇ ∇**

This method reduces the *yang* energy of foods, especially in vegetables, and is not recommended.

## **Cooking with Cooling Ingredients ∇ (e.g., Fruit,**

## **Sprouts)**

Using cooling ingredients during cooking balances excessive *yang* parts (such as meat) and harmonizes the meal as a whole.

## **Slow, Gentle Frying (Braising) Δ**

Braising with high-quality vegetable oil supplies only a moderate amount of heat.

## **Salting (Pickling in Brine) ∇**

Salt lowers food *qi* and has a cold thermal nature. By reducing the *yang* energy of foods, salting increases *yin* energy.

## **Smoking ΔΔ**

Smoking supplies foods with *yang* energy, but less than with grilling. Smoked fish is recommended as a kidney supplement during colder months. Smoked foods should be used rather sparingly, especially in conjunction with excess salt.

## **Seasoning ΔΔ**

The thermal nature of most spices is either hot or warm. Spices not only season foods, but also have a strong energetic effect on them. They supplement and warm stomach and spleen. From a Chinese medicine point of view, this explains the digestion-promoting effect of many spices. By using

warming spices such as bay leaf, caraway, or cloves, many *yin* vegetables like red cabbage, white cabbage, or sauerkraut become easier to digest. Long cooking also contributes to this effect. Highly seasoned foods strongly influence the body's energy level and should be reduced or avoided during repletion states or inner heat. For example, energetically hot coffee can be unfavorable with sleep disorders, which are a symptom of internal heat. Sleep disturbances can be provoked by the consumption of acrid spices like garlic, onion, pepper, etc.

**Tip:** Warm or hot spices, which raise *yang*, are recommended for a vegetarian diet to balance the cooling effect of vegetable foods. Foods in general should be seasoned more strongly during cold months to prevent *yang* vacuity.

## **Meal Preparation in Tune with the Five Phases (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water)**

Cooking in tune with the five phases wood, fire, earth, metal, and water is a special method to harmoniously increase the energetic level of a dish. This cooking method follows the engendering (*sheng*) cycle.

The ingredients used in a dish are divided according to the phases they belong to, positioned in a row, and added to the dish in sequence. In keeping with the engendering cycle, the individual phases potentiate each other's energetic effect and increase the overall energetic aspect of the dish.

### **Practical Application:**

- First, heat a pot on a heat source (fire phase). Add oil (earth phase) to move the cooking process one step further in the engendering cycle. To continue the cycle, follow earth with metal ingredients (e.g., onions). Next, add water ingredients (e.g., water with some salt). Now add wood foods (e.g., tomato). Next, add fire foods (e.g., thyme). This completes the first round of the engendering cycle.
- Now the cycle can begin again, starting with earth (e.g., carrots),

followed by metal (e.g., leeks). Each complete cycle may be repeated as often as desired. The more often the cycle is run, the higher the energetic effect of the meal. Each of the phases should be allowed to influence the meal for at least half a minute before a new phase (ingredient) follows. No phase may be skipped within a cycle.

- Individual ingredients may be repeated as often as desired. For example, if using carrots as the only earth ingredient, some of the carrots can be added each time the earth phase comes up in a cycle. If more than one earth phase ingredient is used, carrots can be added in the first cycle, sweet potatoes in the second, and zucchini in the third.
- The phase used to end the Taoist cycle is discretionary, but the last phase added to the dish does impact the overall effect of the dish on the body. If the final ingredient is a pinch of salt, the overall energetic aspect of the meal is focused on the water phase (kidneys). If cooking concludes with a wood ingredient, for example vinegar, the dish will emphasize the wood phase (liver and gallbladder).

*Seemingly strange and unusual ingredients that allow a continuation of the engendering cycle may have a surprisingly positive effect on the overall flavor of the meal.*