



# Fundamentals of TCM Food Therapy

## The Five Flavors:

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) there are five flavors which ultimately correspond to organs.

1. Sour (energetically corresponds to Liver):
  - Astringent, generates yin fluids (think of how your mouth water when you think of something sour).
  - Cooling
  - Small amounts aids digestion
  - Excess sour injures the nerves
2. Bitter (energetically corresponds to Heart)
  - Descend Qi, drain heat and dry dampness
  - Some have purgative effects and induce Bowel Movements
  - Excess injures the bones
3. Sweet (energetically corresponds to Spleen)
  - Some sweet foods are neutral and nourishing such as meats, legumes, nuts, dairy, starchy vegetables
  - Some sweet foods are cooling and nourishing such as fruits, honey, sweeteners, potatoes, rice and apples.
  - Excess injures the muscle and causes dampness
4. Pungent/Spicy (energetically corresponds to Lung)
  - Warming actions which promotes energy to move upwards and outwards towards the body's surface
  - Causes Qi and Blood to circulate
  - Disperses mucus from the lungs
  - Excess can injure the Qi
5. Salty (corresponds to Kidney)
  - Cooling and hold fluids in the body
  - Downward flowing action, soften hardness/nodules and act as a purgative
  - Excess injures the blood

These flavors have specific actions on the body. If used correctly they can have positive effects on organs, if used incorrectly, can yield negative effects.



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## The Five Natures:

In TCM) foods have 'natures' to them and because of those natures have a direct effect on the body. Similarly to flavors, they can be used for medicinal benefits.

1. Cool
2. Cold
3. Neutral
4. Warm
5. Hot

Depending on your Pattern Differentiation (underling imbalances), which can be determined by your Acupuncture Physician, you may get instructions to eat or avoid particular flavors and natures of food.

## Effects of Cooling Foods:

- Clears heat and toxins
- Cools and calms the blood, nourishes the yin

Symptoms related to conditions in which cooling foods may be beneficial may include: the body feeling hot, thirst, pungent and extremely foul smelling stools, burning of the anus, anxiety, red eyes, red face, emotional, ulcers in the mouth, cold sores. **Not everyone who needs cooling foods will show any or all of those symptoms. Not everyone with those symptoms needs cooling foods. It is imperative to have an experience TCM physician guide you with your food therapy.**

## Effects of Warming Foods:

- Raises the yang and qi or organs
- Warms and improves circulation, dispels cold

Symptoms related to conditions in which warming foods may be beneficial may include: cold hands and feet, cold body, diarrhea, stomach pains or abdominal discomfort after eating or drinking cold things, bloating after eating, lack of energy, sore joints, edema and fluid retention. **Not everyone who needs warming foods will show any or all of those symptoms. Not everyone with those symptoms needs warming foods. It is imperative to have an experience TCM physician guide you with your food therapy.**

Generally speaking, fruits and vegetables are cooler than meat- however, there are always exceptions. Seafood is cold and ginger root is hot. Raw foods tend to be cooler than cooked foods, but of course, there are exceptions- raw chili peppers are hotter than steamed crabs.



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## **Cooking Methods:**

Cooking methods play a role in the nature of the food. A food can be cold in nature but “warmed” up quite a bit by the cooking method used to prepare it.

The following cooking methods are listed from COLDEST to HOTTEST:

**Raw – Steamed - Boiled - Stewed - Stir fried - Baked - Deep fried - Roasted - BBQ**

*Adapted from Lotus Acupuncture in which it was Edited and Excerpted from Source: The essential guide to Acupuncture in Pregnancy and Childbirth by Debra Betts © 2006*

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