

WINTER HEALTH NOTES

The weather has finally shifted and it is beginning to seem like winter. According to the Law of the Five Elements, the **winter** months correspond to the Water phase and the Kidney meridian.

During the winter months, plants pull nutrients into their roots as the plant life cycle becomes virtually dormant on the outside. We too need to nourish ourselves internally during this time of year.

- ❖ find quiet moments to focus on your goals for the new year
- ❖ conserve your energy to be ready for the burst of Spring
- ❖ reflect within yourself to recognize your strengths

Please remember that according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) you need to receive acupuncture during the change of seasons – we lovingly call these “seasonal tune ups”. Yes, just as you would tune up your car on a regular basis, you need to tune up your body energetically with acupuncture.

This can be especially helpful if you suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) due to the diminished sunlight in the winter. Acupuncture will strengthen your energy and give you an emotional boost at the same time. Acupuncture helps allay any anxiety or melancholy associated with this condition. Acupuncture is also helpful during the winter season to ward off the possibility of the flu and the common cold.

Most flu activity in the US occurs between November and March. In an average year, more than 100,000 Americans are hospitalized, and more than 20,000 deaths are related to the flu. The “flu” is a highly contagious respiratory infection. The flu, compared with the common cold, often causes more severe illness. People with the flu can have a fever, (usually 100 to 103 in adults and often even higher in children), cough, sore throat, extreme fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny nose, and watery eyes. Children can also experience vomiting and diarrhea. Some older people might not suffer from fever. Flu-related complications can occur at any age; however, older people or those with chronic health problems, particularly heart or lung disease, are much more likely to develop serious complications and influenza infection than those that are younger and healthier.

Acupuncture strengthens the “wei qi” also known as defense qi (vital energy) which is likened to the immune system. Several clinical studies have demonstrated that acupuncture and herbal medicine reduce the incidence of upper respiratory tract infection and shorten the length of time one is ill.

In China, people of all ages go for acupuncture on a regular basis to ward off disease. In the US, most people wait until it has already penetrated their system. We as Americans can create less problems in our life if we were to focus on prevention rather than waiting until it’s too late. So, do something to enhance your Qi now, before the influenza virus hits.

Other things you can do to maintain balance and health, especially to ward off pathogenic influences during the winter months:

Practice an exercise such as Tai Chi, Qigong or Yoga to warm you up, but not make you sweat.

- ❖ Eat a full balanced diet rich in vitamins, antioxidants, and minerals. Foods containing beta-carotene help boost your immune system and keep your mucous membranes and upper respiratory system healthy. Carrots, broccoli, sweet potatoes, garlic and tomatoes are high in beta-carotene. Make nutritious, warming soups such as Chicken soup to strengthen your self.
- ❖ Drink plenty of pure water to prevent dehydration. Ample liquids also help your body flush out toxins.
- ❖ Get plenty of rest and relaxation to recover from the daily stresses of life. Your body transforms extra energy left over at the end of a day during sleep into a special Qi that gets stored in your body for times of extra stress. We never know when this special reservoir of energy will come to our rescue. You may even find time for a cat nap in the afternoon to nourish your Heart Qi.
- ❖ Rub the crown of your head in a circular fashion nine times clockwise and nine times counter clockwise. This is a special acupuncture point called Governing Vessel 20 or Hundred Meeting Point. Rubbing this point in this way raises the Yang energy of your entire body and will lift your spirit.

The ancient Chinese classics teach us that human beings should live in harmony with the natural cycles of their environment. The cold and darkness of winter urges us to rest, store physical energy, and find inner warmth. Warm hearty soups, whole grains, and roasted nuts help to warm the body's core and to keep us nourished. Please attempt to use as many organic, locally grown ingredients as possible. This practice not only promotes optimal health and well-being, but it also serves to better sustain the environment for generations to come.

Speedy Recovery Soup

- 1 cup pearl barley or brown rice
- 10 cups free-range chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1.5 cups chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped carrot
- 2 cups chopped or thinly sliced shiitake mushrooms
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 2 tbsp of chopped ginger root
- red or black pepper to taste

Rinse the barley and place in a pot with 4 cups of stock and a pinch of salt. Bring this to a boil, cover and reduce heat to low. Once the liquid is absorbed (approximately one hour) remove from heat. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a large pot and add the onions, carrots, mushrooms, celery, and ginger. Allow this mixture to cook together for 5 minutes, stirring regularly, until they soften. Add the

remaining stock to the veggies, bring to a boil and then let simmer on low heat for 30 minutes. Add the cooked barley, mix, add seasonings if necessary, and simmer for another five minutes.

This soup is especially great for the beginning stages of flu or colds- mushrooms are known for their ability to boost the immune system

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine one way typical cold of flu can enter the body is through the upper back, shoulder, neck, and hands, and wrist. Be sure to bundle up during the windy- cold winter months with the following suggestions:

1. Keep your head covered: Many people are surprised to learn that 60% of the heat lost by the body is lost through the head. Wearing a hat to cover your head is therefore very important for keeping warm. A wool hat is a necessity; if you really feel the cold buy a sheepskin hat--this will give you full protection against the blistery winds that blow. Also wear a pair of earmuffs to protect your ears.
2. Close "gaps": neck and wrist openings are potential sites for heat loss. Wearing a scarf around your neck and long gloves or mittens can help you close these gaps.
3. Layering creates warmth: Wear many layers of loose clothing, as this ensures that there are pockets of air between the clothing layers that insulate your body from the cold. For the upper body, a long sleeved shirt worn over an undershirt and topped with a sweater and coat is best. For the lower body, a pair of long underwear underneath a pair of pants will keep you warm. Underwear made from silk is very comfortable, and polypropylene is good for outdoor sports, although both of these materials tend to be expensive. Pants need to be loose-fitting--remember that the idea is to keep warm air close to your body. Tight fitting pants and jeans do not help to keep you warm.

QIGONG IS A WAY TO HELP YOURSELF

Mind-body techniques such as Qigong are effective in helping you beat the winter blues. Qigong has been practiced for more than 2,000 years and promotes both physical and emotional health through a series of slow and fluid gestures. Qigong can help you relax by bringing more oxygen in to your body through deep breathing techniques. Proponents of Qigong say that the practice can help you increase peace of mind, improve mental clarity, increase energy and vitality, boost metabolism, lower blood pressure, flush the lymphatic system, improve balance and fluidity of movement, and oxygenate tissues. It accomplishes this through gentle, flowing movements that result in Qi cultivation, storage and refinement.

Learn more information about and how to practice Qigong with Shoshanna's book ***Qigong for Staying Young: A Simple 20 Minute Workout to Cultivate Your Vital Energy*** available along with a companion video and DVD.

Shoshanna's Qigong workout includes warm-up exercises to increase strength and flexibility, seven individual sets to detoxify internal organ function, open meridian pathways, increase energy, balance yin/yang, strengthen endocrine function, build bones, and nurture heart and pacify spirit, and a warm down to smooth and store vital energy. Give yourself the gift of self-healing through Qigong!