

WINTER HEALTH NOTES

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), it is important to receive acupuncture treatments at the change of seasons to keep yourself healthy. In the TCM world we 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.

According to the *Law of the Five Elements*, each season is associated with the element of fire, earth, metal, water or wood. When acupuncture is received to strengthen and balance a particular element, it also treats its' associated organ systems.

The specific element associated with winter is "water" and the associated organ systems that need "tuning up" during this time are your kidneys and bladder.

FIRST POINT:

The water element (kidneys and bladder) is associated with the virtue of wisdom and the negative emotion of fear. Just as our kidneys are deeply rooted, so is fear. We aren't always consciously aware of how much fear and insecurity exists within ourselves. A modest amount of fear is considered healthy as it protects and keeps us from foolhardiness.

Excessive fear fosters insecurity in our daily lives and is believed to injure the kidney energy. By restoring the kidney energy with acupuncture treatments during the winter months, fear is lifted from your mind and body resulting in a feeling of elation and inner wisdom.

SECOND POINT:

The *Theory of Yin and Yang* teaches that yin, among other things, is associated with cold and internal aspects of our being – whereas, yang is associated with heat and the more external aspects. Because of this, the winter (most yin part of the year) is an excellent time to look within to unify with your body's natural winter spirit. Paying special attention to the internal aspects of your being will naturally cultivate the yin energy of your body. This means becoming more quiet and reflective as you connect with your inner nature.

Cultivating, nourishing and balancing of the yin aspect of yourself in this way leads to an overall sense of inner calm, self-acceptance and a more carefree nature. Your acupuncturist will provide you with additional support by directing your winter tune-up treatments toward balancing yin energy, thereby enhancing introspection

How to shift into a more inner receptive state:

Give yourself time each day to relax, go for a walk, commune with nature, listen to music, or cozy up with a book. Find your "healer within" during a therapeutic massage. Give yourself the space and time to hear and feel what is going on inside of you. Figure out what it is you truly need and give it to yourself. Stay active to keep your body supple, even though yin energy is dominant. Spend some time doing yoga, tai chi or qigong by yourself in a quiet, secluded spot.

THIRD POINT:

When, how and what you eat also has a profound effect on your health during the winter months.

According to the *Law of the Five Elements*, the kidney energy is associated with the ears. Joyous sounds of cooking and happy voices from the kitchen stimulate the appetite and fortify the kidneys.

Cooked, warming foods such as hearty soups fortify the kidney energy and are recommended during the winter months. Specific foods nourish the kidney energy such as barley, tofu, string beans, asparagus, dark colored beans, roasted nuts, dark fruits such as blackberry and blueberry, seaweed, and animal products including fish, eggs, dairy products, duck and pork. Make sure to eat these foods cooked or dried during the winter months. Also remember to eat the proper amounts for your body and chew slowly as you concentrate on your food during mealtimes. Sometimes how much you eat is more crucial than what it is you are eating.

HEARTY RECIPE TO FORTIFY THE KIDNEYS — BLACK BEAN SOUP

This soup takes approximately 2 hours to prepare not including time to soak the beans and serves 5-6 people.

Step One: Rinse 2 cups of dried black beans, cover them with water and let them soak for several hours.

Step Two: When ready to prepare the soup discard the water that the Beans have been soaking in and place in A saucepan with 3 1/2 cups of water and one inch strip of Wakame seaweed (found in any Japanese or Health Food Store). Step Three: Bring to a boil, cover and then simmer for 1 ½ hours over a very low heat until tender.

Step Four: chop 2 stalks of Celery, 1 Yellow Onion, and 1 Carrot and saute in olive oil until slightly soft.

Step Five: add the vegetables to the beans along with the zest of a large orange and 2 teaspoons of savory. Continue to simmer over the lowest heat possible for approximately 15 minutes. the beans should be soft and splitting open.

Step Six: Take the soup off of the stove and stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons of brown Miso. Depending on the desired consistency, you could leave it as is or add a little more water if it's too thick And/or puree in a blender.

Serve Hot with fresh lemon juice and a sprig of parsley.

FOURTH POINT:

Guided imagery is a way to use your mind intent to create self healing. This particular exercise is combined with gentle breathing techniques to maximize benefits.

According to the Law of the Five Elements, **dark blue** is the color associated with the water element (kidneys and bladder). **Dark blue** can thus be used to strengthen the kidneys and bladder simply by imagining that these organs are being bathed in **dark blue** light. This is especially helpful when practiced during the winter season to strengthen and balance the water element.

Dark Blue Light Imagery Exercise:

To begin, sit comfortably on a chair in an upright position with both feet on the floor. Keep your eyes open with your eyelids half closed, focusing your intention inward. Rest your hands on your lap. Relax your shoulders. Sit quietly for a few moments and breathe naturally as you concentrate your mind on your belly as it expands and contracts with each breath. When ready, imagine that your belly is a balloon and take three gentle, rhythmic deep breaths, inflating your belly balloon on the inhalation and deflating it on the exhalation. Make sure to expand your belly balloon outward, but also backward toward your spine.

Next place the palm side of your hands on your lower back. Begin taking an additional three deep breaths, this time visualizing your hands filling with a beautiful dark blue light on the inhalation and send it from your hands to your kidneys on the exhalation. As you do this, see this dark blue light healing and strengthening your kidneys to nourish and protect them. Lastly, move the palms of your hands to the lower part of your belly and take an additional three deep breaths. This time fill your palms with this beautiful dark blue light on your inhalation and send it to your bladder. As you do this, visualize this dark blue light nourishing and strengthening your bladder. You can repeat this guided imagery exercise daily.
