

TCM and Summer

Summer is a time of abundant energy, long sunshine-filled days and warmth. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, summer has many different associations that help define it. The element of summer is fire, the color of summer is red, the emotion of summer is joy and the governing organs are the heart and the small intestine. But what does all of this mean? Let's find out.

The TCM system relies heavily on the five elements and how they work and interact within the body. In TCM, there are multiple levels. The first is that of yin and yang. At the most basic level, yin is like water and yang is like fire. As mentioned, fire is the element of summer. Thus fire is yang in nature, which means it is symbolic of maximum activity. During the summer months, everybody and everything is more outgoing or outward in nature. And as the heart is the main organ associated with the season of summer, it should be paid close attention to and nourished to remain healthy.

The heart's main function is to circulate oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. In TCM, mental activity is also associated with the heart. This is known as Shen in Chinese medicine. The Shen is sometimes compared to our mind, but it is actually much deeper than that. The Shen includes our thought processes, memory, consciousness and emotional well-being. And summer is the most appropriate time to calm the Shen and provide it with enrichment that will last throughout the whole year. When the fire element is balanced, the mind is calm, sleep is sound and the heart organ is strong and healthy. If the fire element is not balanced, there may be depression or an excess of joy, which manifests as mania. Symptoms of an unbalanced fire element include heartburn, insomnia, agitation, nervousness, digestive upset, rashes, palpitations and excessive perspiration.

There are quite a few ways to keep the heart and fire element balanced during the summer months. Meditation and deep breathing are easy to do, plus, they require no expensive equipment to perform and can be done anywhere.

Going outside and engaging all of your senses is another easy way to nourish heart health. A technique known as "grounding" has been gaining popularity over the past decade and science is showing it can be very beneficial. All one has to do is walk or stand in the grass while being barefoot. The energy from the earth is quite healing. And while you're there, take time to listen to the sounds of nature that surround you and enjoy the fragrances of the flowers. These things are also grounding and have a calming effect on the mind and body.

Probably the two most important things you can do for heart health during the summer months is drink plenty of fresh water and eat cooling foods. No matter what season of the year, water is vital and it is recommended we drink at least 64 ounces per day. Cooling foods like fruits are good at keeping fire under control, which is healthy for the whole body.

Lastly, if you are experiencing a heart or fire imbalance, consider adding acupuncture to your routine. Acupuncture is very good at reducing or increasing the body's yang/fire, depending upon your individual needs. Finding a licensed acupuncturist in your area may be the best decision you can make when it comes to staying happy and healthy.

Three Teas to Keep You Cool

As summer moves on and the warmer days continue, you will find yourself seeking ways to beat the heat. Herbal teas are a great way to cool both the body and mind. Cooling herbal teas can alleviate symptoms of excess heat and have you feeling your absolute best during these heat-intensive summer days.

Check out these three herbal teas that will ensure you stay cool.

1. Mint, Elderflower and Rosehips Tea

The combination of mint, elderflower and rosehips makes for a soothing herbal tea. Rose hips provide a much-needed boost of vitamin C, the elderflower lends its immune-cleansing benefits and the mint finishes off the tea with the cooling touch of menthol.

2. Lemon Hibiscus Tea

This is an herbal blend just as good cold as it is hot. Regardless of the way this tea is poured, it provides specific cooling benefits to the body. Hibiscus is high in vitamin C and combats against high blood pressure, liver disease and other ailments. Lemon has a kick of vitamin C too, but more importantly it is cleansing and a natural diuretic. This tea combination is both cleansing and cooling.

3. Iced Green Tea with Lemon and Mint

The perfect summer refresher. The combination of these three ingredients work together in perfect harmony in order to cool the body down. Packed with vitamin C, menthol and antioxidants this tea will get your constitution headed in the right direction.