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LIFE FOOD

Eat foods that suit your body



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
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(FOTOLIA)

When it comes to traditional Chinese medicine, many will only think about acupuncture or, perhaps, herbs.

Cures using food are also key in this medical system. Sun Simiao, creator of one of the first encyclopedias of clinical medicine and a famous TCM doctor, said, "People who practice medicine must first thoroughly understand the source of the disorder and know what has been violated. Then, use food to treat it, and if food will not cure it, afterwards apply medicine."

TCM founding principles around food start with finding the right foods for each individual, but there are many aspects that can be applied globally. Focus on local, seasonally available foods. These foods are ideal for the environment in which you live. Tropical foods like coconut, bananas, pineapples, and mangoes are not Canadian foods, so while they are healthy, they should not be staples to a person living in British Columbia.

Nutritionists will often emphasize eating a rainbow-coloured selection of fruits and vegetables. TCM doctors agree with this, but go a step further, recommending specific foods related to treating particular health issues. For example, mushrooms, which are generally white or beige, are recommended to support a healthy immune system, while green, leafy vegetables are emphasized for detoxifying the liver, and orange or yellow sweet potatoes and yams are selected for improved digestion.

The shape of foods may indicate their potential benefits. Carrots sliced into rounds look like our eyes. Tomatoes, with their red colour and four chambers, look like our heart. Walnuts look like our brains, and an avocado looks like a womb. The herb ginseng is shaped like a whole body, thus its name, ren shen, meaning "man root," and its use to support the whole body.

Foods are also assessed as creating warmth or coolness in the body. Some people have more heat symptoms like high blood pressure, excessive perspiration, canker sores, constipation, and heartburn, and may benefit from cooling foods like mint, watermelon and cucumbers. Others have cold symptoms like poor circulation, bloating, aching joints in cold weather, and fatigue, and would be best to choose warming foods like ginger, pumpkin and cinnamon.

Enjoy delicious and healthy food and consider talking to a TCM practitioner for details about what specific foods best suit you.

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