

Food  
for  
Thought

Compiled by  
Jim Thomas, M.Ac.

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# Thoughts on Food

Dear Reader,

I have assembled this booklet with articles I have collected over the years related to maximizing the life energy available to us from our food. It is also my intention to raise awareness of the politics, ethics and ecology of eating and how our choices not only impact our personal health but the health of the planet as well. I have included Michael Pollan's article entitled Unhappy Meals from the New York Times that eloquently discusses these themes.

The potency of food as a primary therapy is grossly underestimated and largely ignored by the general medical population and the culture at large. The Chinese (and other traditional cultures) have a very different vision on the qualities of food and how they affect us. Modern nutritionists are concerned with classifying food according to its biochemical qualities obtained through laboratory investigation, and studying the affects of isolated nutrients. "The problem with this approach," points out Marion Nestley, a New York University nutritionist, "is that it takes the nutrient out of the context of food, the food out of the context of diet, and the diet out of the context of lifestyle." This orientation becomes most apparent in scanning the titles of the current trendy diet books which assume that there is one diet from one part of the world that is appropriate for everyone.

The Oriental view, on the other hand, does not apply this reductionist approach to food, or for that matter, to life. Food and eating are placed back in to the complexity of a human life. This dynamic approach includes the subtle observation of how particular foods affect the body, mind and spirit, the frame of mind in which you eat, the manner in which food is grown and prepared, and the relationship and expression of natural forces that are unique to each food and locale. Centuries of keen observation have produced a sophisticated and integrated approach to food and eating that is essential in balancing the chi or life force of the body. The emphasis in this system is not so much on balancing fats, proteins and carbohydrates, but on consuming foods whose energetic properties are nourishing and revitalizing for specific constitutional types. While the Chinese dietary tradition holds that there are basic principles to healthy eating, it acknowledges the uniqueness of each person, food and locale and the importance of taking these factors in account in choosing foods that are most appropriate for each individual.

Blending the best of modern nutrition with oriental traditional food wisdom offers an opportunity to become more conscious about our relationship to growing and eating food. A "healthy" diet is one that not only deeply nourishes us, but is beneficial and healing to our community. Our choices impact both our personal and planetary vitality.

May you eat more consciously and joyfully!

Jim

# CHINESE DIETARY GUIDELINES

Prepared by Greg Padrick, Licensed Acupuncturist

Frequently my clients ask me what should they eat. They have tried diets including some of the following: The Atkins, Pritikin, or Ornish diets, Food coming, “Blood Type” diet, the Paleolithic diet, the “Zone”, “Sugar Busters”, Raw Food diets, and Macrobiotics. After all the expenses for books and attempts at changing their food intake, most have stopped and felt a sense of failure...until the next fad diet comes along in the form of a glossy book promising to restore the health and vitality (but especially the physique) of a teenager to us again. It is amazing that, in a time of supreme self awareness and technological advances, are still often unaware of the basic food needs for our health.

Chinese medicine, of which acupuncture and herbal therapy are elements, also contains dietary guidelines. Fortunately for us they are simple to follow, do not require any major changes or new methods of eating, and, most importantly, have been tried and tested for over 3500 years. In fact, long before acupuncture as we know it came about, shamans and local healers within Chinese communities would often prescribe dietary changes and herbs to restore health.

To better understand what the Chinese would consider to be a healthy diet, first we have to grasp the importance of the digestive process. Eating and digesting our food is what give us energy for vital bodily functions, and thus sustains our lives. When we eat, digestion begins in the mouth with the enzymes in the saliva. We swallow our food, where the stomach, small intestine, large intestine, liver, pancreas, gall bladder and the colon continue the process of breaking down the food particles into absorbable bits. These are excreted. We have a superb system for converting food into energy, yet our diet is often the one aspect of our life that we neglect the most.

Long ago the Chinese recognized three vital points:

- 1.) Everything that is eaten or drunk must be heated to 110 degrees Fahrenheit before the body can process it completely. The Chinese view the digestive system as a cauldron on top of a cooking fire. If the cauldron is filled with icy drinks or cold fruits and vegetables, it will take more energy and time for the body to heat the food up in the stomach to a temperature suitable for digestion. However, if we eat warm food and drink warm (or room temperature) liquids, we are helping our digestion. More energy can be put toward completing the digestive process, which translates into better health, and reaching and maintaining an ideal weight.
- 2.) Some foods are better for health than others. We all have heard the saying that “we are what we eat.” Unfortunately this means many of us are composed of French fries, sodas, white sugar, and other fast foods. Nobody can seriously convince me that they believe a cheeseburger and large fries are healthy, no matter how good it tastes. Healthy goods include: fresh, steamed, or stir fried vegetables, fresh fruits, and dairy products. Organic foods are better than the alternative, although organic products tend to be nearly prohibitively expensive. On the other hand, foods that need to be avoided include deep fried foods, oily foods, extremely spicy and irritating foods, sweets, candy, white sugar, white flour, sweetened yogurt, processed and canned food, high fat dairy products, fatty meat, cold beverages, coffee, alcohol, and artificial sweeteners.
- 3.) Not everyone can eat the same foods and be healthy. Some of us have better digestions than others. Some people can eat ice cream daily and never gain an ounce, while others can gain weight just by looking at the Dunkin’ Doughnuts sign. We all have our strengths and weaknesses – regarding diet, the key is to know which foods make us strong and healthy, and which others do not, and avoid those items that harm us.

- 4.) The old saying “everything is moderation” also applies to Chinese dietary guidelines. A problem with changing one’s diet is that many people start off well, but eventually falter due to cravings, or frustrations or guilt. The key to maintaining a healthy diet is to have a goal and work toward it slowly, rather than rushing into too many changes and setting us up for the downfall. We have to allow ourselves that piece of chocolate every once in a while. By listening to our bodies, noticing our reactions to foods, taking time from our hectic schedules to prepare healthy meals and enjoy them with our families and friends, and remembering the importance of a healthy, sustaining, energizing diet, we will find that other aspects of our lives will become enriched and life giving. Some general suggestions include the following:
- a. Buy food that would be available locally in each particular season, i.e. leafy greens in the spring and root vegetables in the fall and winter
  - b. Eat your biggest meal at breakfast and decrease the amounts for each subsequent meal.
  - c. The digestion process begins in the mouth so chew, chew, and chew! Eat slowly in a peaceful atmosphere and focus all of your attention on eating (avoid reading at the same time for example).
  - d. Switch from margarine (contains Trans fatty acids which are extremely dangerous) to butter. A small bit of butter will not be bad for you and will actually supply your body with necessary fats and vitamins.
  - e. Drink water throughout the day, at least 64 oz. Try to drink filtered water without ice.
  - f. Abstain completely from drinking soft drinks (even diet soft drinks). “Normal” soft drinks contain a tremendous amount of refined sugar, and both NutraSweet and Saccharin are actually poisonous over time.
  - g. Triple your intake of fresh fruit (not canned or frozen) and fresh vegetables
  - h. Have spinach at least once per week.
  - i. Have broccoli at least twice per week.
  - j. In place of snacking on crackers, chips, etc. have snacks consisting of fresh fruit, raisins or other dried fruit (without preservatives), carrot sticks, celery and a handful of unsalted pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds or almonds.
  - k. Reducing or eliminating dairy products will benefit you greatly. Remember that cow milk is designed to quadruple the size of a baby cow in six months. Dairy products inhibit the digestive energy greatly, and put unhealthy weight on people quickly. Also, the body poorly absorbs the calcium in dairy products due to the large amounts of protein. Better sources include green leafy vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, kale, etc.
  - l. Have brown rice as your staple grain.
  - m. Eat lots of soups, preferable homemade and fresh, for soups are very nourishing to the body, as they help the digestive system reach and maintain the needed 100 degrees Fahrenheit
  - n. Use black and white pepper, cardamom, fresh ginger root, ginger powder, cloves, nutmeg, orange peel, and fennel often as cooking spices as these stimulate the digestive energy to process food better.
  - o. Make all dietary changes slowly, for most people fail when they feel deprived. Visualize how you would like to see yourself, how you would like to feel, and keep this in mind when you eat to help you make better choices for your health.

## BASIC HEALTHY DIET TO HELP THE MIDDLE BURNER

- Eat mostly vegetables and grains with small amounts of other foods.
- Eat mostly cooked and warm food which is not too sweet, not too greasy or oily and not too damp.
- Eat moderate amounts and chew well
- Drink a teacup of warm water or a warm beverage with meals
- Avoid chilled, cold and frozen drinks and foods with meals
- Rice should be the staple grain

## REMEDIAL DIETARY THERAPY:

### Earth Deficiency with Dampness

- Eat to help the Middle Burner, as stated above
- Avoid concentrated sweets such as sugar, honey, molasses, and maple syrup.
- Minimize consumption of cold foods, i.e. icy drinks, frozen foods, and lettuce, celery, cucumbers, watermelon, mung beans, buckwheat, seaweed, mango, millet, pears, persimmon, spinach, tomatoes, and wheat
- Avoid dampening foods such as milk, dairy products, nuts and nut butters, citrus fruits and juices, pineapple juice, tomatoes, vegetable oils, sugar and sweets, and fatty, greasy, oily foods.
- Eat lots of cooked vegetables, cooked rice, small amounts of poultry and white fish, and small amounts of cooked fruits.
- Use a moderate amount of drying and warming spices such as cardamom, black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
- Eat foods that are light and easy to digest.
- Eat soups and stews.
- Chew food thoroughly.

### Liver Depression, Stomach Heat

- Eat to help the Middle Burner, as stated above
- Avoid overeating of heavy, hard to digest foods such as nuts, nut butters, bread and meat
- Avoid hot, spicy, pungent, and acrid foods such as peppers, mustards and strong spices.
- Avoid alcohol, coffee, greasy fried foods, fatty meats and chemicals and preservatives.
- Eat freshly cooked vegetables, and especially dark, leafy greens.
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### Kidney Yin Deficiency

- Eat to help the Middle Burner, as stated above.
- Avoid sugars and sweets, alcohol, coffee, and other stimulants.
- Avoid the excessive use of dry, pungent, warm and acrid spices.
- Eat plenty of warm, easy to digest soups and stews, lots of cooked vegetables and grains and slightly more animal protein than someone else might.

### Damp Heat

- Eat to help the Middle burner, as stated above.
- Eat somewhat more cooling, diuretic foods, such as barley, watermelon and other melons, watercress, celery, carrots, cranberries and cucumbers. These should be lightly cooked (except for the melons and cranberries).
- Rice should be the staple grain.
- Avoid sweets, chocolate, nuts, ice cream, frozen yogurt, alcohol, and greasy, oily and fatty foods.

If you truly enjoy what you eat and make conscious food choices, you won't need fad diets or find yourself eating when you're not hungry....**SO COME TO YOUR SENSES**

"Close your eyes and take five long, deep breaths," she says, practically whispering. "Let your body relax. Become aware of your thoughts and feelings and see whether you can tune in to the place in your belly where your food will land. Notice how full or empty that place feels. If "1" is uncomfortably empty and "5" is uncomfortably full, where are you?"

I'm at "3". It's 11 o'clock in the morning, and Alison Shore Gaines, who teaches "Conscious Eating for Sacred Nourishment" at the Kripalu Center for Your and Health in Lenox, Massachusetts, is leading me in a conscious-eating exercise. Prompted by her calm and steady voice, I pick up my plant and look closely at the shape and texture of the food that "is about to become my body."

Three walnuts, three raisins, two cashews, one fig, and half an orange – hardly a feast, I think.

"Notice which foods seem most attractive to you," Gaines says. "Take in the different aromas and identify which foods smell the best to you. When you feel ready, choose the food your body is calling for and take it in your hand. Be aware of its weight and texture; smell it again: put it in your; mouth and chew until it's liquid."

Chewing is the foundation of conscious eating. "There aren't any teeth in the stomach," say the soft-spoken nutritional consultant and lifestyle educator. When we chew food thoroughly, Gaines points out, we digest and assimilate its nutrients better. Apparently, most of us have an overly acidic diet, and saliva tends to be alkaline. Extra chewing mixes the food thoroughly with saliva, which alkalinizes our food, adapting it to our body chemistry and helping the entire digestive process.

All this sounds scientific, but what I notice is that chewing my fig until I can't chew it anymore slows down my normally rapid rate of consumption. "If I ate this way every day," I think to myself, "I'd eat a lot less."

A compulsive eater since childhood, Judith H. took Gaine's five day workshop because she was "looking for more peace around food and eating." While the fifty something Vermonter enjoyed many aspects of the program – eating breakfast in silence, guided visualization, lifestyle assessment, and nutritional information – the simple act of chewing her food "until it's pulverized" has had the most lasting effect.

"When I chew thoroughly, it slows me down enough to know when I've had enough. I lose weight without trying," Judith says. Following the program, Judith continued chewing at a rate of about 35 times per mouthful and lost 24 pounds in six months – doing nothing else differently.

Desirable as it may be, losing weight isn't the point of conscious eating. The point is to become more mindful of how, what, and why we eat so that eating becomes less of a knee-jerk reaction to stress and unpleasant emotions and more of a sacred way to nourish both body and soul.

“I learned,” Judith says, “that my eating behavior was driven by a long standing fear of being hungry later. I was overeating to pacify that fear.”

Examining the underlying causes of stressful eating is a necessary component of Gaines’ s program. “If we’re starving in some aspect of life – starving for affection, creativity or freedom that shows up in our eating. As we learn to address those underlying hungers,” she says, “our overeating eases naturally.” But Gaines stresses that the ideas behind conscious eating aren’t just for dysfunctional eating patterns; they will help anyone have a healthier approach to food.

Because relaxation is central to conscious eating, Gaines, a certified Kripalu yoga instructor, teaches students different yogic-breathing exercises in her three and five day workshops. The three part calming breath, in which you inhale into the bottom, middle and top of your lungs and exhale in reverse order, aids digestion by inducing relaxation.

Upon awakening, students do a 10 minute series of energizing breaths combined with a simple movement. Not only does it oxygenate the blood and get circulation going, it also heightens people’s awareness of their natural appetite. “So often people stumble out of bed and start the day with a doughnut and a cup of coffee,” Gaines says, “but when you engage the body’s true needs you might realize the doughnut dulls your invigorated sense of energy, while the small of an orange gives you a feeling of brightness. When you tune in to the subtle effects of the food on your well being, that’s intuitive eating.”

According to the 52-year old educator, attuning to where tension is held in the body can prevent overeating. Before meals, Gaines asks students to notice if they have a tight belly or elevated shoulders, for example, as unreleased emotions may be stored there. “Instead of mindlessly eating,” she says, “breathe into the tension and turn in to your feelings. That way, you don’t have to eat them.”

Still, Gaines doesn’t prohibit eating for comfort versus nourishment. She believes eating when unpleasant emotions arise is acceptable in moderation – as long as you’re aware of why you’re eating. “When I eat to sooth myself,’ she says, “I take breaths and really savor the comfort I’m receiving from the food. When I do that, I often find I receive comfort from the first few bites and don’t need to eat more.” She wasn’t always wise. As a teenager, Gaines craved sugar and wrestled with body image issues. Her mother hoped a doctor would prescribe the right diet. Instead, he gave Gaines diet pills, and a cycle of yo-yo dieting was born. “I was never able to maintain the weight loss,” she recalls. Smoking cigarettes and overworking later became tools Gaines used to control her hunger.

It wasn’t until friends introduced Gaines to yoga, meditation, and the natural foods movement in the 19670’s that she developed a greater acceptance of her body and learned about “better ways of eating.” She began to understand, she says, how inner turmoil contributes to emotional eating. “It took me about five years,” she says, “but yoga and meditational really helped me work through my emotions and accept myself.”

From 1977 to 1982, Gains ran Alison’s Restaurant, a natural foods luncheonette in West Chester, Pennsylvania. She prepared organic juices, soups, salads, and sandwiches – and even taught cooking classes.

It was at Alison's Restaurant that customers began to seek out the Philadelphia native for nutritional guidance. In 198, in an effort to find support for her commitment to natural health and conscious living, Gaines moved to Kripalu Center. The conscious-eating program she teaches three times a year at Kripalu has developed organically out of her own experiences and study.

What has worked for Gaines seems to work for others. Dorothy Cochrane had "used food for emotional reasons" for years, but when menopause began increasing her appetite and causing weight gain, she signed up for Gaines's program. The benefits have lasted well beyond her first days at Kripalu. "It's absolutely helped me recognize when I'm physically hungry versus emotionally hungry." Cochrane says questions like "Where's your hunger?" have helped her differentiate a genuine need for food from something that's a stand in for it. "I definitely eat less," she says, "because I notice when I'm closing in on being full much sooner."

How we eat says a lot about how we're living, according to Gaines. Maintaining a stressful, unbalanced life makes eating consciously next to impossible. Nevertheless, she doesn't advocate that everyone do breathing exercises and chew 35 times per mouthful at every meal. A good start she says, is to eat mindfully once a day. If that's not possible, try it at least twice a week. "It takes 21 repetitions to incorporate a habit into your way of living," she says.

When it comes to what to eat, Gaines believes in choosing whole foods in a variety of colors most of the time. "What we eat 80 percent of the time is what we become," she says. "The nutrients in our food eventually become our skin, bones, and organs, as well as our emotional and mental well-being. If we think to ourselves before putting food in our mouths, "This will become my body," we might be more discerning about what we choose to eat."

I look down at my plate, the fig is gone, as are the nuts and raisins. What remains is the orange. As I slowly chew its citrus flesh, I enjoy the taste of sour mixed with sweet. "Mastering conscious eating," Gaines says, "is about choosing when to swallow. Only when food is fully liquid is it ready to go to the next stage of digestion."

I swallow, quiet and contemplative, and an insight emerges, "Eating consciously," I think, "makes me aware not only of how and what I'm eating, but of how and what I'm feeling – and that makes me more aware I'm alive."

"When you're really practicing conscious eating," Gaines says, "you're practicing conscious living."

By Portland Helmich

*Body Soul Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2004

# 7 Steps to Conscious Eating

By Ann Boehler Ostrowski  
*Body & Soul*, Jan/Feb 2004

Conscious eating isn't about strict diets. Instead it's a whole new way of approaching food and with emotions that go along with overeating. Here Alison Shore Gaines boils down the steps to a more healthful relationship with food.

1. Practice radical self acceptance. "Instead of berating yourself when you overeat, learn to think "I must have needed something. How can I meet this need now?" says Gaines. As long as you are judging and berating yourself, you'll constantly need to comfort yourself with food, she says.
2. Learn to relax. "It's been said before, but learn how to breathe fully – all day long," says Gaines. "By the time a binge is about to happen, it's too late. Everything in the 24 hours leading up to it is where you have your power." Breathing fully all day keeps stress levels manageable – and ferocious chip cravings at bay.
3. Feel your feelings. Try to recognize what you're feeling instead of simply stuffing your feelings; Gaines recommends seeking support through a workshop, therapist, or group. "It's when we don't know why we are eating or what we are trying to feel that we go compulsive," she says. Yoga is also a great way to get in touch with your mind and body.
4. Take three long, deep breaths before you eat. Do this every time you sit down for a meal. It'll help you relax your body focus on the food, and put an end to mindless scarfing. It's easy to do anywhere, in any situation, and it works.
5. Chew your food slowly when you can. You don't have to chew each bite at every meal the recommended 35 times to see a difference. Try it for one meal a day or even twice a week in the beginning. Consistent practice will help make it a meditation so that when you are busy, in a social setting, or eating on the run, you'll still be aware that you're tasting and chewing.
6. Explore food cravings. Learn to recognize the difference between a craving for spinach and a craving for ice cream, says Gaines. A hankering for spinach likely means your body needs iron or another nutrient found in the leafy greens. But a craving for ice cream doesn't mean your body is in dire need of butterfat. More likely, it means you're experiencing an emotional or spiritual hunger, she says. Learning to identify these hungers is key to building a better relationship with food.
7. Find ways to light up your life. "So often eating has to do with feeding a hungry heart or should." Says Gaines. She recommends that instead of filling your should with Double Stuff Oreos, you ask yourself what you love doing and do it. Used to love painting? Pick up a brush and dabble. If dancing is your passion, sign up for a refresher class.

# The Right Combination

By Hale Sofia Schatz

Eating Wisely, *Yoga Journal*, Sept/Oct 2003

If You've ever tried to practice yoga right after a meal, then you know how uncomfortable your Downward Facing Dogs and spinal twists can feel with a full or bloated belly. Even if you've finished eating several hours before stepping onto the mat, your body may still be working to digest your last meal, which means less available energy for your practice. To keep your body feeling light and vibrant, look within – to your digestive tract.

The main reason we eat is to provide our bodies with the fuel we need to live – fuel for walking, thinking, making art, working, playing with our children, and doing yoga. But the very act of digestion also takes energy. You can assist your body's digestion before you even take the first bite of food.

A basic rule for combining foods is: The simpler the

If you think of the stomach as a blender that purees food into a molecular soup, then what you eat together at one time doesn't matter because it all gets mixed up anyway, right? Wrong.

Different foods have different digestion times and require different digestive enzymes. Therefore, eating too many kinds of foods at one time – such as proteins with grains, fats, and sugars, a la the common peanut butter and jelly sandwich – can result in difficult digestion. Eating the appropriate food combinations not only helps improve digestion, it can also increase energy, regulate elimination, and help relieve depression, anxiety, and mood swings. And increased physical energy means more vitality, clarity, and focus in all areas of life. Although food combining isn't a panacea, it can ease digestion so that energy flows through the body unimpeded.

We do yoga not just for the sake of physical results, but so those results – a strong, supple and receptive body – give us greater success to our spirit. Why should feeding ourselves be any different? Think of food combining as food yoga. By keeping the core of our bodies functioning with ease, we can access our inner selves more deeply because less of our attention is diverted to the physical.

## Process of Elimination

How often do you actually think about the food that's being digested by your body? Most of think about digestion only when we suffer indigestion – bloating, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, and the other unpleasant symptoms that direct our attention to our bellies. The digestive tract is the center of the body – the alchemical furnace in when what we eat is transmuted from separate foods into the fuel our bodies and minds need. The next time you eat something, think about when your food actually becomes you.

The digestive tract has three basic functions. The stomach separates the food into smaller parts, the small intestine completes the breakdown and assimilates nutrients to supply to the rest of the body, and the large intestine eventually eliminates any remaining waste. Keeping this system in good working order is essential to overall health and vitality.

Digestive problems can arise as we age, undergo stress, eat too quickly or on the run, or eat diets composed of refined and rich foods, too much food, or foods eaten in complicated combinations. Eventually, the proper flow of digestive juices slows down, compromising the breakdown of foods in the stomach and the small intestine. Like any plumbing system, the digestive tract can erode or get backed up, resulting in chronic diarrhea and/or constipation. If elimination doesn't happen properly, we don't receive the nutrients we need and toxic waste matter can remain in the system. This causes us to feel uncomfortable and lethargic; the flow of life energy is blocked.

The word *digestion* comes from the Latin for "separate" or "arrange" In fact, this is exactly what happens in the digestive tract: nutrients, in the form of molecules, are separated from food and arranged through assimilation to provide energy for all the body's internal organs. With food combining, you assist digestion by separating the prearranging your food before it even lands in your stomach.

Although medical research hasn't yet been done on the specific benefits of food combining, this system, which has been around in various forms since the 1930's, is based on the understanding that eating foods in combinations that have compatible enzymes and digestive times makes for easier and more complete digestion. High protein foods require the acidic medium of the stomach to be broken down, whereas carbohydrates require the alkaline or neutral medium of the small intestine. When light protein and high carbohydrate foods are eaten together, digestion becomes more complicated, since the transit time for carbohydrates is slowed by the breakdown of protein in the stomach. If the breakdown is impeded, then the absorption of nutrients and elimination also may become more difficult, with undigested food particles remaining in the system. These undigested particles can create allergens, bacterial imbalances, and other disorders in the gastrointestinal tract.

### **A Simple Approach**

In many aspects of life, with simplification comes less excess. The same is true for the body. In a world obsessed with abundance and the availability of every imaginable foodstuff 365 days a year, food combining helps us simplify our food choices. The basic rule of thumb is: The simpler the meal, the easier digestion will be. Simple meals, moderate portions, and chewing food slowly and with an attitude of reverence all help maintain easy digestion and free flowing energy in the body. It doesn't take long to get the hang of food combining with these simple guidelines:

Fruits are the easiest and fastest foods to digest, and for that reason should always be eaten separately from proteins, grains, and vegetables. They are further classified into acid, sub acid, sweet, and melons – based on their levels of acid and sugar – and have their own set of guidelines for combinations (see "Food Combining for Easy Digestion"). Digestion time: 20 minutes to one hour.

All vegetables can be combined with one another as well as with proteins. For optimal digestive case, it's best to combine only non-starchy and low starch vegetables with grains. Digestion time: 30 minutes to two hours.

Grains can be eaten alone or combined with non-starchy and low starch vegetables. Do not combine grains with protein or with starchy vegetables. It's best to have only one type of grain at a meal, so decide if you really want that hunk of bread or if it's worth waiting for the rice. Digestion time: two or three hours.

Proteins can be eaten alone or combined with non-starch, low starch, and starchy vegetables. It's best to have only one type of protein at a meal. Digestion time: two to four hours.

## Food Combining for Easy Digestion

### Vegetables, proteins, and grains

Improve your digestion and increase your energy by combining the appropriate foods at mealtime. Vegetables can be eaten with one another as well as with proteins, grains can be eaten alone or in combination with non-starchy and low-starch vegetables, and proteins can be eaten alone or with any type of vegetables.

| <b>NON-STARCHY AND LOW STARCH VEGETABLES</b>   |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Arugula  | Chard  | Lettuce   | Scallions   |
| Asparagus  | Collard greens   | Mesculun greens   | Sea vegetables (arame, dulse, hijiki, nori, wakame) |
| Bok choy, pak choy, tatsoi   | Corn (fresh)   | Mizuna greens   | Spinach   |
| Broccoli   | Cucumbers  | Mushrooms   | Sprouts   |
| Brussels sprouts   | Dandelion greens   | Mustard greens  | Squash (summer)                                     |
| Cabbage (red, green, napa, savoy, Chinese)   | Eggplant   | Onions  | Tomatoes  |
| Cauliflower  | Green beans  | Peas  | Turnips (white)                                     |
| Celery   | Kale   | Peppers   | Watercress  |
|  | Leeks  | Radishes (red, black, daikon)   |   |
| <b>STARCHY VEGETABLES</b>  | <b>PROTEINS</b>  | <b>GRAINS</b>   |   |
| Artichokes (Jerusalem), Beets, Burdock, Carrots, Parsnips, Potatoes, Rutabagas (yellow turnips), Squash (winter), Sweet Potatoes, Yams | Avocadoes, Beans, Eggs, Fish, Milk and other dairy products, Nuts, Olives, Poultry, Red Meat, Seeds, tofu and other Soy Products | Amarant, Buckwheat, Millet, Oats, Quinoa, Rice, Spelt, Wheat and flour products |   |

### Fruits

Fruits should always be eaten separately from proteins, grains, and vegetables, since they digest so quickly. Based on their levels of acid and sugar, fruits are divided into four categories – acid, subacid, sweet, and melons. (Melons are the fastest foods to digest and should always be eaten alone).

| <b>ACID</b>  | <b>SUBACID</b>          | <b>SWEET</b>               | <b>MELONS</b> |
|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Clementines  | Apples                  | Bananas                    | Canaly        |
| Grapefruit   | Apricots                | Dates                      | Cantaloupe    |
| Kiwis        | Berries                 | Dried fruit                | Casaba        |
| Lemons       | Cherries                | Figs(fresh)                | Christmas     |
| Limes        | Grapes (most varieties) | Grapes(muscat or Thompson) | Honeydew      |
| Oranges      | Nectarines              | Mangoes                    | Musk          |
| Pineapple    | Peaches                 | Papaya                     | Persian       |
| Pomegranates | Pears                   |                            | Watermelon    |
| Strawberries | Plums                   |                            |               |
| Tangerines   |                         |                            |               |

When selecting what to eat, consider not only the culinary appeal of your choices but how your body will interpret the foods you are about to ingest. Ask yourself: Will these foods fuel my body so it can be a strong vehicle for my spirit, or will they slow me down? Feeding yourself purposefully is like doing yoga off the mat: each choice of what and how to feed yourself is an opportunity to practice awareness, compassion, and self love.

Hel Sofia Schatz is the author of [If the Buddha Came to Dinner: How to Nourish Your Body to Awaken Your Spirit](#) (Hyperion, available in 2004). She is a holistic nourishment consultant in Boston.

# The Energetics of Food: Eastern Wisdom in the Western Kitchen

By Daverick Leggett

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*Editor's Note: Daverick Leggett is a Qigong teacher and author living in Devon, England, who will be coming to Maryland next September. Daverick is well known for his pragmatic and non-dogmatic approach to food. He emphasizes dissolving concepts of good and bad foods, the importance of pleasure and listening to the wisdom of the body. His works have been very well received by the Chinese medicine community, as useful for the practitioner as they are for the client.*

*This article is reprinted with permission from the Fall, 2002 edition of the AOBTA newsletter PULSE news, [www.aobta.org](http://www.aobta.org)*

## **East and West**

To begin with it is helpful to explain one or two differences in viewpoint between East and West. You are already familiar with the notion of Qi, the fundamental reality underlying our physical existence. As you know, the Chinese along with many cultures (our own included until a few hundred years ago) perceived a subtle reality underlying our material life. Not unlike modern physics, the world is seen in terms of energy and vibration. The subtle movements of Qi are traced in medicine, in agriculture, in all fields of human life and the vast workings of the cosmos are seen mirrored in the details of daily life. The cultivation of our life force, our Qi, is the fundamental principle of leading a healthy life.

Secondly, a western understanding of food is dependent upon the analysis and breakdown of food into its basic constituents. In the West, food is described as possessing certain quantities of nutrients (this much protein, that much iron, this much vitamin A, etc.). Eastern understanding is derived from the observation of human behavior once a food is taken into the body. Food is assessed according to the nature and quality of its Qi. All foods are seen as having certain behaviors when they enter the human body. Some foods activate our metabolism, some foods slow us down; some foods generate warmth in the body, some generate coolness; some foods are moistening, some drying; some nourish our kidneys, others our liver or heart.

Thirdly, one of the basic principles of eating using principles of Asian medicine is that we eat according to who we are. There is no such thing therefore as the universally applicable "right" diet. Each person will have a different constitution and therefore different nutritional needs. It is not possible to diagnose our own constitution by reading a short article like this one. This is better done with the help of a skilled practitioner of Asian medicine. Suffice it to say that a person is described as a combination of certain basic qualities such as Excessive or Deficient, Hot or Cold, Dry or Moist. A person may also be described as having a particular tendency towards imbalance in an organ or element. These constitutional patterns are what determine each person's best diet and what is right for one person may not work so well for another.

## The Language of Food

Now that we have established these basic differences in outlook we can learn to speak the language, not Chinese, but the language of food. Food is described in a language that seems more poetic than scientific. Our western food labels list the principle nutrients, fat levels and carbohydrate count (a labeling system which panders more to the neuroses of western society than truly serving our understanding). For example I have just pulled a can of sardines out of our larder (kitchen cabinet) and on the back I read that it contains 190 kilocalories of energy, 21.3 grams of protein, no carbohydrates and 10 grams of fat per 100 gram serving. This sparse set of numbers, which fails to even tell you that sardines are an excellent source of calcium, is quite honestly of little use to anyone except weight watchers or possibly athletes. It reflects the view of the body as machine that is still at the heart of western medicine. I don't know what it says on a can of sardines in China because I can't read it. However, I do know that sardines are described within Chinese nutritional theory as follows: they are neutral in temperature, possessing a salty and sweet flavor. They nourish the Blood, help remove water from the body and especially benefit the Stomach and Spleen. So what does this mean? Let's take it stage by stage. Amongst the qualities assigned to food in Chinese medicine, the temperature is the most important. This does not mean whether you eat it hot or cold but is instead a measure of the effect on our metabolism after initial digestion, its energetic temperature. Quite simply, some foods warm us up, others cool us down. Cucumbers, tomatoes and yogurt, for example are down at the cooling end while peppers, lamb and garlic are up at the warm end. Sardines, then are in the middle.

With an understanding of the temperatures of food we can already establish a few guidelines about the right kinds of food for our condition. A Primarily hot person will need to eat a somewhat cooling diet: plenty of fruit and vegetables, fish rather than meat and not too many spices or fatty food or heating substances such as alcohol. A cool person will need a more warming diet: plenty of stews and casseroles, warming ingredients such as ginger or garlic and not too many cooling substances such as tea or raw food.

Sometimes when we are ill with a cold or the flu there may be a simple cure right in our kitchen: a hot acute illness where we are restless, feverish, inflamed, perhaps with a sore throat or high temperature, can be helped by a cup of elderflower or peppermint tea or by a simple thin vegetable soup of courgette, (zucchini), celery or carrot. It can also be made worse by eating inappropriately i.e. eating hot foods such as a Mexican style fry up or congesting foods such as meat and dairy. If your illness is more cold with shivering aches and a desire to curl up with hot water bottle, the opposite principle can be applied: ginger tea or a thin onion soup will be helpful and cold foods such as fruit or salad, or congesting foods will slow down the recovery.

The flavor of a food tells us a little more about its action. There are five basic flavors (sweet, pungent, salty, sour and bitter) each of which benefits a particular organ and carries out certain actions. Sweet foods are seen as moistening and nourishing, pungent foods as dispersing stagnation and promoting flow, salty foods as softening and detoxifying, sour foods as stimulating absorption and contraction, and bitter foods as draining moisture and counteracting dampness.

A food may have various other actions, strengthening some function or substance or regulating the flow of our body's energy. Some foods strengthen our Blood, some our Qi, some our Yin and some our Yang. Others drain dampness, stimulate circulation or drive out pathogenic forces. Sardines are especially good for the

Blood, chicken nourishes our Qi, sesame seeds strengthen our Yin, walnuts strengthen our Yang. Other foods have more regulating actions: fresh ginger drives out cold, cabbage removes heat, fennel circulates the digestive Qi, olives remove toxins and rye drains dampness.

When we look at our diet from an energetic perspective it becomes apparent that we are already applying energetic principles to balance our food. Many traditional recipes reflect an underlying understanding of energetic principles. For example, let's look at lamb and mint sauce: lamb is seen as a "hot" meat in Chinese medicine and mint as a "cool" herb so we can see that the combination creates a natural balance. Watermelon on the other hand, which is "cold" is often eaten with "hot" ginger (maybe in the UK but it sounds good!) Similarly beef, which is seen as a dense and somewhat "dampening" food is helped by horseradish which both cuts through beef's heaviness and helps dry the dampening effect. You may be able to think of other examples of traditional combinations that feel right together.

Our diet adjusts naturally to season and weather. We need more warming foods in winter and can accept more cooling foods in summer. In dry climates we need more moistening foods, in damp climates more drying foods. In England, which tends to be damp and cool, a national diet that is generally warming and drying would be appropriate. Unfortunately your national diet is over dependent on wheat, dairy, sugar, meat and fat, a very dampening combination made work by our sedentary lifestyles. A more appropriate national diet would include several more native grains such as rye, barley and oats, considerably less sugar and dairy (goat and sheep products are more suited to our needs), a wide range of vegetables and fruits, a little fish and meat (less beef and more chicken) and the imaginative use of a far wider range of leaves and seeds than we habitually consider edible.

### **Western Recipes, Eastern Principles**

To apply these principles in our daily lives we simply need to know who we are in terms of Chinese medicine. Is our stomach hot, is our liver stagnant, is our blood weak? You don't need to eat Chinese food or learn to handle chopsticks to benefit from the knowledge that has been accumulated over so many centuries. You simply need to understand your own unique constitution, adopt a few simple principles, learn a little bit of new language and turn your kitchen into a playground for new ideas.

So here, finally, are a couple of recipes to try. You can find over a hundred such recipes in my book *Recipes for Self-Healing*. These recipes are straight forward western recipes using familiar foods. For each recipe I have described its actions in terms of Chinese medicine to give some idea of how the principles of Chinese nutritional therapy work in action

#### ***Dill Salmon Bake***

I've only cooked the recipe once. It happened spontaneously one evening when I was feeling creative and wondering how to honor the piece of salmon I had. Fortunately I was wise enough to write down what I did. It was unbearably delicious.

3 lbs. potatoes

2 large onions

1 lb. salmon  
2 glasses of white wine  
4 teaspoons dill weed  
2 oz. butter  
Salt  
Pepper

Boil the potatoes until about three quarters cooked. Meanwhile slice the onions in rings and cook gently in a little butter for 10 minutes or until they just start to soften. Cut the salmon into one inch chunks. Put all the ingredients into a greased ovenproof dish in layers: onions, then potatoes, then salmon, then onions and potato again. Sprinkle with dill and salt as you build up the layers. Pour in the white wine and set a few knobs of butter on top. Sprinkle with freshly ground black pepper, cover and bake for 25-30 minutes at 400F.

### **Energetics**

This is a gently warming dish that will suite all constitutional types. The salmon nourishes the Yin and Blood whilst also mildly warming the Yang, with assistance from the wine. The potatoes strengthen the Qi and the onions warm the body and counteract Phlegm, Dampness and Stagnation. The dill benefits the digestion.

30 minutes preparation

30 minutes cooking

Serves 4

### ***Roasted Pepper and Avocado Dip***

This recipe blends together hot and cool tastes. It is a smooth, silky, beautifully colored dip with a perky undertaste. The dip can be served as an accompaniment to many meals, used in salad dressing or in sandwiches or even as filling for baked potato.

1 red pepper  
1 green pepper  
1 red chili pepper  
½ avocado  
3 cloves garlic  
3tbs. Fresh coriander leaf  
Juice of ½ lime  
¼ c. olive oil  
½ tsp. salt  
1 heaped tbs. Capers

Roast the peppers in a hot oven (450F) removing them when almost burned (about 30 minutes). Let the peppers sweat for a while in a covered dish or paper bag and when they are cool remove their skins as best you can. Scrape out the seeds from both kinds of pepper. Now blend together all the ingredients except the capers, which are turned in once the dip is made. This recipe will make about two cups.

### **Energetics**

Avocadoes are cool tonic for the Blood and Yin with moistening action on the Lungs and Intestines. They also pacify and smooth the action of the Liver. The peppers and garlic on the other hand are hot and pungent, stimulating circulation and Yang energy. They are supported in this by the more gentle action of the coriander. Lime is very beneficial for the Liver and helps with the digestion of the rich avocado. The extreme action of the hottest ingredients is well balanced by the avocado's soothing and moistening action. This relish is especially helpful for people who Liver Qi tends to stagnate.

10 minutes preparation

30 minutes cooking

Serves 4

All that remains is to encourage you to explore the world of Chinese food energetic a little further and to wish you bon appetite!

*As well as writing and teaching about nutrition, Daverick Leggett is a practitioner and teacher of Qigong.*

**Helping Ourselves: A Guide to Traditional Chinese Food Energetics**, 1994 ISBN 0 9524640 0 4

**Recipes for Self-Healing**, 1999, ISBN 0 9524640 2 0

**The Energetics of Food**, ISBN 09524640 1 2 a wall chart detailing the energetic properties of western foods

**The above publications are available from:**

Meridian Press

PO Box 3

Totnes Devon TQ9 5WJ

England

Telephone: 01803 863552

Email: [post@meridianpress.net](mailto:post@meridianpress.net)

## LOCAL SOURCES OF ORGANIC AND WHOLE FOODS

### Farmers Markets:

- Mt. Airy Farmer Market, 3 N. Main St., Mt. Airy, open Wednesdays 4-7 pm beginning May 16
  - Six vendors offering a variety of produce, herbs and cut flowers, baked goods, eggs and honey
- Downtown Westminster Farms Market, Conway Parking Lot, at Emerald Hill Lane and Railroad Ave., Westminster, open Saturdays 8 am until noon starting June 2
  - A producers only market. Several produce vendors, some with organic offerings – herbs, vegetable plants, and baked goods, eggs, honey, wool. A new offering this year from Groff's Content Farm of Rocky Ridge, a frozen meat vendor offering organically raised chicken, beef, turkey and eggs.
- Carroll County Farmers Market, Carroll County Ag Center, 702, open Saturdays 8 am to 1 pm starting June 16
  - Fresh produce (in season), cut flowers, perennials, hanging baskets, dried fresh and silk flower arrangements, free weekly demonstrations, baked goods, eggs, jams and jellies and handmade crafts.
- Sykesville Apple Sutter Market, Main St., in Sykesville, next to the train tracks, open the last Sunday of the month from 10 am to 3 pm, June through October
  - Produce vendors, sellers of arts and crafts items.
- Taneytown Farms Market, 529 E. Baltimore St., Taneytown, open Saturday 8 am until noon starting July 14
  - Fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, eggs, hams and jellies, baked goods, homemade soaps and baskets. A hot food vendor with coffee, tea, breakfast and lunch will be available.

Additional details can be found at [www.carrollag.com](http://www.carrollag.com)

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA) AND OTHER LOCAL FARM VENDORS

- De La Tierra Gardens, Jackie Miller, 443-536-3581 [delatierra@wildmail.com](mailto:delatierra@wildmail.com)
  - A certified organic farm in Taneytown. Offering vegetable, herb and flower plants for sale in the spring and a variety of produce throughout the summer. Available at the Downtown Westminster Farmer's Market off of Rt. 27 from June through Thanksgiving. Other markets and a CSA will resume in 2008. Also, produce and plants available upon appointment.
- Groff's Content Farm, Julie & Bob Bolton, 14930 Bollinger Road, Rocky Ridge, MD 21778, 301.447.6148, [www.groffscontent.com](http://www.groffscontent.com), [juliebolton@wildblue.net](mailto:juliebolton@wildblue.net)
  - Selling pasture-raised and finished beef, lamb, holiday turnkeys, whole chicken and free-range eggs. Beef and lamb are frozen and available in wholes, halves and split halves. Products are available at the farm from the USDA inspected processor in Emmitsburg, MD. The animals are raised without added hormones or antibiotics on certified organic pasture.
- Lovell Organic Hay and Beef, Jack Lovell, 2915 Bark Hill Road, Union Bridge, MD 21791, 410.775.7421, [jlovelljr@aol.com](mailto:jlovelljr@aol.com)

- Selling beef, frozen, in wholes and halves. Products can be picked up from the processor in Mt. Airy. Animals are raised on a certified organic farm, fed certified organic pasture, hay and minerals, with no growth hormones.
- Whitmore Farm, Will Morrow, 10720 Dern Road, Emmitsburg, MD 21727, 202.270.4137, [kzo@verizon.net](mailto:kzo@verizon.net)
  - A MD Organic Certified farm specializing in heritage breed animals. Their primary goal is preserving and rebuilding the soil and infrastructure of their historic Emmitsburg, MD farm. In the future, goods will be available through farmer's markets in the Washington, DC Metro area, as well as via on farm sales. Please feel free to call and schedule a visit to sample some of their products and to take in the beautiful pastures and scenery. You are encouraged to see the animals they raise and they welcome the chance to talk with you about each breed. Currently, they have Katahdin sheep, Tennessee Fainting Goats, Americana's and other rare breed chickens, Great Pyrenees, Heritage Breed turkey, and Belted Galloway cows. They expect to start selling breeding stock for poultry, turkeys and myotonic goats in the spring and summer of 2007. Whitmore Farm is a member of ALBC and Slow Food USA. A variety of heirloom fruits and vegetables enhance the farms history.
- White Road Farm, Sally Voris, 5009 Teeter Road, Taneytown, MD 21787, 410.756.9303, [sally@whiterosefarm.com](mailto:sally@whiterosefarm.com), [www.whiterosefarm.com](http://www.whiterosefarm.com)
  - A 132 acre farm in rural Carroll County. The farm promotes beauty, bounty and balance and encourages people to connect with the Earth, the universe and each other. The farm provides a feast for these: flowers, herbs, and vegetables, planted together, attract bees, birds and butterflies. The farm has its own bees, chickens, ducks, geese, Guinea hens, goats, pigs, and turkeys. The sun sets over the Catocin Mountains. White Rose offers premium naturally grown vegetables, herbs and flowers, local unpasteurized honey, local free range eggs, seasonal events and Full Moon Celebrations.
- Summer Creek Farm, Rick Hood, 15209 Mud college Road, Thurmont, MD 21788, 301.271.9399 [farmer@summercreekfarm.com](mailto:farmer@summercreekfarm.com), [www.summercreekfarm.com](http://www.summercreekfarm.com)
  - Features grass fed certified organic chickens selling eggs only, no meat. They also offer certified organic vegetables.
- Ruth Ann's Garden Style Beef, Steve and Ruth Ann Derrenbacher, 11051 Renner Road, Woodsboro, MD 21798, 301.898.7006, [gardenstylebeef@msn.com](mailto:gardenstylebeef@msn.com)
  - Selling Angus grass fed beef. Beef is available in whole, half, and quarter bulk packages as well as by the cut. All bulk beef is picked up, frozen and cryo-packed in see through packaging, from the processor in Mt. Airy in June and December by order only. Individual cuts and ground beef may be available for pick up at the farm throughout the year based on availability. The animals are grass fed and finished with no added hormones or antibiotics.

- Chapel Ridge Meat and Mercantile Inc., 5 Chapel Ridge Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325, 717.334.4222, [www.chapel-ridge.com](http://www.chapel-ridge.com)
  - Selling only “all natural” beef raised on their family farms located in the beautiful rolling hills and valleys South Central Pennsylvania. Their farms lie in the rich farmland of the Susquehanna Valley at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Their purebred Santa Gertrudis beef is raised without the use of herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, hormones, or antibiotics. All of the hay and grains raised on their farms are fed to our livestock; and they drink the cool fresh water from our on farm wells. Their cattle live as naturally as they can provide; and they are slaughtered humanely in a USDA approved butcher shop. They feel that they are given the fit of raising these cattle and it is their duty to see that they live and die well.

## Suggested Reading and References

Healing with Whole Foods – Oriented Traditions and Modern Nutrition, *by Paul Pitchord*

This book is the bible of food and healing. It might be a bit overwhelming for the lay person, but it's an excellent reference and worth the effort to sort through. Be aware that it has about 700 pages, so it is very thorough.

Helping Ourselves: A Guide to Traditional Chinese Food Energetics

Recipes for Self Healing

The Energetics of Food

*All by Daverick Leggett*

A good introduction to food energetics, very user friendly. The third one is actually a wall chart detailing the energetic properties of western food. It is helpful to have the chart hanging in the kitchen so you have easy access to learning about the energetic properties of food you are preparing.

Daverick's publications are available from Meridian Press, PO Box 3, Totnes Devon TQ9 5WJ, England or online at [www.meridianpress.net](http://www.meridianpress.net)

The Tao of Healthy Eating - Dietary Wisdom According to Chinese Medicine, *by Bob Flaws*

A good laypersons introduction to Chinese dietary therapy. It even has a listing of the energetic properties of vitamin and mineral supplements.

Available from Blue Poppy Press, 1800.487.9296 or online at [www.bluepoppy.com](http://www.bluepoppy.com)

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals, *by Michael Pollan*

A must read which examines the politics, ethics and ecology of eating.