



Attuning Your Body to Spring

Each season nature gives us important clues as to what is happening within our bodies and how to best adjust to the changing weather. Eastern healing systems, such as Chinese medicine, are grounded in the idea that the body is a microcosm of the microcosm of nature. The idea is to live in harmony with nature and the seasons, and that when in harmony with the seasonal transformations, we will be more healthier.

Ignoring the lessons of one season can make the subsequent seasons harder to adjust to with health and balance.

In Chinese medicine, the concept of the five transformations or phases uses five elements - wood, fire, earth, metal, water - to describe the correlations of how nature's seasonal cycle is mirrored in the body's systems. Each element corresponds to such things as a season, an emotion, an internal organ (the Chinese organ systems tend not to exactly correspond with the western anatomy), a developmental cycle (i.e. birth, growth, harvest), a flavor, and a color. The five transformations seek to describe in concrete, if not poetic terms, the interrelationships within the body, and is used clinically to recommend acupuncture, food, and herbal therapies.

Spring in Nature

Spring is a time of beginnings when energy is starting to ascend after the still, quiet time of winter. New green buds push their way through the earth with renewed vigor to begin life that has been in a state of germination and preparation during winter. The color of Spring is indeed the green of new plant life. Life is starting to awaken, not only among plants, animals, and insects, but internally within us as well.

To survive the cold of winter, our bodies store energy. Spring is a time to cleanse any excess energy we have stored for the winter season. It is a time literally to lighten our load, emotionally as well as physically to prepare for the heat and activity of summer. The awakening of the vital, life force energy creates a strong, ascending energy. This energy is surging, flowing, and resilient in its purest form. You feel it in the winds of Spring, and you see it in the new blossoms that have survived the winter to renew themselves.

Body Ailments of Spring

Spring's bodily ailments correspond to nature's energetic qualities and tend to happen when we do not find outlets for managing this awakening and ascending life energy. The organs that correspond to Spring are the liver and gallbladder.



The liver in Chinese medicine is responsible for the smooth flow of energy and blood, as well as detoxifying, filtering, storing and replenishing blood, while the gall bladder is responsible for facilitating the digestion of fats and oils. The ailments we are most susceptible in Spring can essentially be attributed to what happens when energy and blood are not flowing smoothly. These ailments occur when the liver becomes congested, usually by any excesses stored during the winter that are no longer needed. This results in ailments such as stiff neck and shoulder (energy or Qi is not flowing smoothly through the muscle tissue); menstrual difficulties such as mood swings, cramps, and breast tenderness (caused by either blood or Qi stagnating in the pelvic area); and frustration, anger, or depression. Other ailments are related to internal winds that are stirred in Spring, similar to the climatic winds. Examples are spasms, allergies, headaches, and skin conditions that migrate locations and change in severity. Skin conditions, in general, can occur more often in Spring because the skin, as our largest eliminative organ is working harder during this time of year to cleanse any accumulated toxins.

Food, Lifestyle, and Herbal Strategies for Spring

As in any season, it is important to attune to your body's natural instincts. For Spring, this means giving this vital, emerging energy opportunities for expression through such things as exercise and movement. Equally important is engaging in internal processes that seek to understand and clear obstacles to growth or creativity. This can mean finding ways to expressing creative energy in ways meaningful to you, whether it be through art or envisioning a new home or work project.

Food-wise, this means cutting back, or even avoiding foods that congest or overstimulate body systems, such as caffeine, alcohol, sugar, fried foods, dairy, nuts, and meats such as turkey (creates heat in the liver where chicken does not). Raw foods and iced drinks and foods are also important to cut back on and/or avoid because their damp, cold nature can also impair the liver's functioning. It is important to include foods that naturally cleanse and clear the liver, such as dark green leafy vegetables, as well as other in-season vegetables (be sure to cook them) and whole grains (such as quinoa, oats, rice, etc.). Adding lemon juice to water also helps to clear a congested liver.

Herbs, can be equally helpful in staying balanced during Spring. Beneficial herbs that cleanse heat and toxins from the liver, as well as support it are recommended, such as nettles, dandelion root, burdock root, or milk thistle tea. Herbs that build blood are also helpful during Spring, such as Chinese angelica (*angelica sinensis*) or any berries (raspberry, blackberry, strawberries). Also, herbs that stimulate digestion, such as fennel, tangerine peel, tumeric are also good choices for tea or for spicing foods.

michele collins
HERBALIST



Michele Collins, MPH, Herbalist
336-624-6727
michele@spiritrisinghealing.com