

Acu News

"Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still." -Chinese Proverb

Sweet N' Salty Food Taste in TCM

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), food is considered medicine. Herbal formulas mostly consist of food items like twigs, berries, nuts, fruit skins, roots, flowers and animal products. Food also has qualities beyond the biochemical nature assigned by Western medicine and nutritionists. Food also has elements such as taste and temperature, color and texture. **These qualities go to specific organs that identify with these elements and are absorbed and benefited by them.**

Let's explore five main food tastes: **salty, sweet, sour, pungent and bitter** - which organs they are associated with, and how food choices can affect your health and well being.

Salty

Salty foods are associated with the kidneys and bladder, the water element, black and winter season. Salty foods are said to soften hardenings and dissipate nodules like we see in lumps, masses and cysts. Salty food also helps with low back pain, knee soreness, fertility and is anti-aging due to the kidney association with bones, basic constitution, fertility and sexuality.

An example of a food that is salty is **seaweed, which helps goiter.**

Sweet

Sweet foods are associated with the spleen and stomach, the earth element, late summer season and the color yellow. Sweet foods help the digestive system transform and transport food. These foods tonify the body and harmonize other flavors in a formula and are also considered a tonic. Sweet foods help low energy, ease pain and relax tension.

Examples of sweet foods are **yams, fruit, carrots and honey.**



Sour

Sour foods are associated with the liver and gallbladder, the wood element, green, and spring season. Sour foods are astringent and absorb, which means they hold in fluid and stop discharge, as in excess sweating and diarrhea.

Examples of sour foods are **lemon, vinegar and fermented food.**

Pungent

Pungent foods are associated with the lungs and large intestine, autumn, white and the metal element. These foods disperse moisture and promote circulation; they move stagnation. Pungent foods also open pores and promote sweating. They are used in colds to promote sweating and expel pathogens.

Examples of pungent or acrid foods are **garlic, ginger, mint, scallions, daikon and peppers.**

Bitter

Bitter foods are associated with the heart and small intestine, summer, red and the fire element. Bitter foods dry dampness (excess mucus in the body), have a cleansing action, a descending action (so they promote urination), clear heat (symptoms like insomnia restlessness, palpitations, a red tongue, rapid pulse and anxiety indicate heat), and edema.

Examples of bitter foods are **kale, parsley, collard greens, endives, and sesame seeds.**

How to know what to eat? It's all about balance. It's best to eat what's in season and be in harmony with the rhythms of nature. It's also a good idea not to overdo any one flavor. Too much sour in the diet hurts the liver and creates stagnation, in the same sense, too much cold-food hurts the stomach and affects the digestive fire resulting in bloating, gas, loose stools and fatigue.

These symptoms, in turn, may make one crave sweets to counterbalance the deficiency in the stomach. When an herbal formula is created for a specific ailment, there is a balance of flavors so we don't have an overabundance of one that can create a problem elsewhere. It's best to schedule an appointment with us in order to get a proper diagnosis and dietary recommendations designed for you.

In the meantime, stay in season with fresh market choices, have a variety of colors in your food and experiment with a nice balance in food choices and cooking.

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