

# Taking Medicated Diet Into the 21st Century

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As a matter of course in traditional medicine, one is faced with the undeniable truth concerning herbal concoctions; they taste awful. In order to circumvent this, the resourceful herbalist prescribes food recipes that can replace the foul-tasting brews. This is particularly useful when formal care regimens are replaced with practical folk-based methods. The availability of formal supplies (herbs, drugs, etc.) is usually absent in areas where barefoot doctors are needed.

With this in mind I approached INAM, a barefoot doctors program in the Philippines. My purpose was to compose a manual of Filipino medicated diet recipes using the principles of Chinese food herbology. The INAM directors gave me a list of diseases commonly encountered by their barefoot doctors. After much careful research, I was able to find recipes containing the foods which were categorized by their medicinal properties in the Chinese texts. These were then screened for ingredients which might disqualify the recipe by neutralizing medicinal actions. Several months after completing the manual, I met with the INAM directors and staff and spent one week training them in its use. This included daily lectures and a final exam.

The process of selecting appropriate recipes requires identification of medicinal ingredients and specific combinations. The first step was to find recipes in the Chinese texts which were similar or identical to Filipino dishes. As an example let us take the category of the common cold. The common cold is differentiated into syndromes of wind cold, wind heat, and summer heat with damp. The first recipe for wind cold is ginger and sugar tea.

- Fresh ginger 9 g
- Brown sugar 12 g
- Dissolve in boiling water and steep for 10 minutes

The chief herb is fresh ginger. It is spicy and warm, and activates the lung, spleen and stomach. Its function is to release the exterior and to expel cold. The deputy is brown sugar. It is sweet and slightly warm and activates the lung and spleen. Its function is to increase *qi* to potentiate the chief. It also harmonizes the flavor of the recipe. This recipe is useful at the onset and in milder stages of wind cold. There is an identical Filipino recipe called salabat, made with either dry powdered ginger or fresh ginger.

The next recipe is for more severe wind cold, especially with chills. The Chinese recipe is *shenxian zhou* (fresh ginger and glutinous rice porridge).

- Fresh ginger 6 g
- Glutinous rice 100 g
- Green onion with root-hairs 30 g
- Millet vinegar 10 ml
- Bring 250 ml water with rice and ginger to a boil. Simmer over low heat until reduced to thick porridge. Add sliced green onion (the white part only) and cook 10 minutes longer (covered). Remove from heat, add vinegar and serve warm.

The chief herb is fresh ginger. It is spicy and slightly warm, and activates the lung, spleen and stomach. Its function is to expel cold and release the exterior. The deputy is green onion. It is spicy and warm and activates the lung and stomach. Its function is to support the ginger's warming and diaphoretic functions. The envoys are polished glutinous rice and millet vinegar. The polished glutinous rice is sweet and neutral and activates the spleen and stomach. Its function is to activate the middle burner and promote absorption. Millet vinegar is sour and bitter and warm. It activates the liver and stomach, improves circulation and harmonizes the ingredients.

The closest barefoot doctor recipe is *arroz caldo*. This a very common dish as a folk remedy for upper respiratory problems.

- Chicken 50 g
- Fresh ginger 6 g
- Green onion 30 g
- Round-grain polished rice 100 g
- Salt to taste
- Bring 750 ml water to a boil and add rice and ginger. Reduce over low heat until thickened. Add thinly sliced cooked chicken and chopped white of the spring onion. Cook 10 minutes, covered. Serve warm.

The chief is fresh ginger. It is spicy and slightly warm and activates the stomach, spleen and lung. Its function is to expel cold and release the surface. The deputy is green onion. It is spicy and warm and activates the lung and spleen. Its function is to support the ginger to help expel cold and release the surface. Chicken is the assistant. It is sweet and slightly sour, and activates the five viscerae. In this recipe, it supports the constitution and should be omitted for the first two days of treatment to prevent it from strengthening the cold virus. Round-grain polished rice and salt are the envoys. The rice is sweet and neutral and activates the spleen and stomach. Its function is to activate the middle burner and to aid in the absorption. Table salt is cold in nature. In this recipe, its function is to harmonize the ingredients.

To treat stomach fire with lung *yin* deficiency in diabetes, the medicated diet texts suggest *zhu yi tang* (pork pancreas soup).

- 1 pork pancreas
- Astragalus root 60 g
- Job's tears seed 30 g
- Chinese wild yam 120 g
- Decoct all ingredients in 750 ml water over low heat until the meat is soft. Discard the astragalus and consume.

The chief is pork pancreas. It is sweet and neutral and activates the spleen and stomach meridians. Its function is to nourish stomach *yin* and regulate the middle burner. Astragalus root is an assistant. It is sweet and neutral and activates the lung and spleen. Its function is to generate fluids and support the *yin* of the lung and stomach. Jobs' tears seed is an assistant. It is sweet and neutral and activates the spleen, stomach, large intestine and lungs. Its function is to fortify the lung, spleen and stomach. Chinese yam is the deputy. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the spleen, lung and kidney. Its function is to generate fluids and fortify the lung, spleen and kidney. The action of this recipe is to quell stomach fire by generating fluids and fortifying the functions of the lung and stomach.

The barefoot doctor recipe for stomach fire with lung *yin* deficiency is *pinakbet*.

- Bitter melon ½ cup
- Eggplant ½ cup

- String beans ½ cup
- Okra ½ cup
- Squash ½ cup
- Lean pork 100 g
- Shrimp paste 1 tsp
- Cooking oil 2 tbs
- Tagalong onion ½ cup
- Garlic 2 cloves

Slice bitter melon, lean pork and okra. Chop eggplant, squash, string beans, onions and garlic. Sauté all ingredients in wok after adding cooking oil and shrimp paste. Serve when vegetables are cooked through and meat is tender. Bitter melon is the chief ingredient. It is bitter and cold, and activates the lung, stomach and small intestine. Its function is to quell stomach fire. Eggplant is one deputy. It is sweet, bitter, cool and bland. It activates the spleen and stomach and clears heat. String beans are a deputy. They are sweet and cool, and activate the spleen, stomach and kidney. Their function is to generate fluids. Okra, squash and lean pork are assistants. Okra is sweet and neutral, and activates the spleen and stomach. Its function is to support *yin*. Squash is sweet and neutral. It activates the spleen and stomach, and supports *qi*. Lean pork is sweet and salty and neutral. It activates the spleen, stomach and kidney, and nourishes the essence and supports the *yin*. Shrimp paste is salty and cold, and activates the kidney. Its function is to harmonize the recipe and nourish *yin*. Tagalog onions are spicy, sweet and warm. They activate the lung and spleen and harmonize this recipe. Garlic is spicy and warm. It activates the spleen, stomach and large intestine, and regulates *qi* and harmonizes the recipe. This recipe's action is to quell fire and generate fluids to treat stomach fire with lung *yin* deficiency in diabetes.

These recipes are approached by slightly different methods but are still basically the same. While one supports fluid production and one suppresses flame with cold, they both quench stomach fire and dampen it to prevent flaring.

In some cases, the ingredients are entirely different, yet they achieve similar results. One aspect of insomnia is heart *yin* consumed by flaring of liver fire. These recipes contain very different ingredients, but the results are the same. Soft Extract for Calming the Liver and Tranquilizing the Mind consists mostly of sugars and fruit. It quiets liver fire and nourishes the *yin*.

- Longan fruit 1,000 g
- Red date 500 g
- Prunella spike 200 g
- *Suan zao ren* 100 g
- Honey 1,000 g
- Cane sugar 250 g
- Decoct red dates, prunella and *suan zao ren* in 1,500 ml water. Reduce the liquid to 750 ml. Mix strained decoction with honey, longan and sugar in a pot. Cook for an hour until a thick syrup is obtained. Take 9 to 15 ml with boiled water twice daily. Chew longan thoroughly and swallow.

In this recipe, longan is the deputy. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the heart and spleen. It calms the spirit and nourishes heart blood. Red date is an assistant. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the spleen and stomach. Its function is to calm the spirit and nourish the spleen. *Suan zao ren* is another deputy. It is sweet, sour and neutral, and activates the heart and liver. Its function is to calm the spirit and nourish heart and liver *yin*. Honey is an assistant. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the lung and spleen. Its function is to nourish *yin* and harmonize the recipe. Cane sugar is sweet and neutral, and activates the lung and spleen. Its function is to harmonize the recipe. This recipe calms the spirit, nourishes *yin* and *qi*, and quiets liver fire.

These recipes originate within China. Because many of the traditional Chinese ingredients are present in the indigenous recipes of other Asian foods, the local cuisines of Thailand, Korea, Japan and Vietnam commonly conform to the requirements of the traditional medicated diet. Variation from Chinese-style cooking is not extreme in these cultures and composing medicated diet recipes is fairly uncomplicated. The next step to introduce medicated diet to the public is to compile recipes from geographic locations other than Asia using combinations of ingredients described in the traditional literature. Such distinctive food cultures as those of the Mediterranean northern Europe and Britain, India, Mexico and the Caribbean should be considered.

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