



FOOD AND IMMUNE HEALTH

Nourishing Ourselves and Our Patients in the Time of COVID-19 (Pt. 2)

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Supporting a Healthy, Harmonized stomach and Spleen (Cont. From Part 1)

Fermented foods are eaten throughout the world, and are among the oldest and easiest methods of food preparation. Fermented foods include sauerkraut, pickles, miso, tempeh, tamari, kimchi, kombucha, natto, kefir, yoghurt and others. These foods are filled with probiotics and support the promotion of beneficial bacteria to the gut, a key component of the immune system.

As a general guideline during this time, minimization of all dairy is recommended, as it contributes to dampness. If you do eat any yoghurt or kefir, try goat or sheep products, which have a smaller fat molecule and are easier to digest. Add warming aromatic spices (cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg) to the food to counter the cold and damp quality of those foods.

Additional Foods to Support Immune-System and General Health

Vinegar is sour and sweet, and adds dimension to cooked greens and bean soups. Added to meat stews, it helps in the digestion of the fat. Adding to warm water prior to eating can help to stimulate necessary stomach acid for digestion. *Note:* Vinegar is *not* a beneficial food if you are getting sick.



Nutrient-dense foods such as animal food in small quantities, trout, salmon or catfish, eggs (nourishes stomach / spleen, blood, *qi* and yin), avocado, good-quality fats, nuts and seeds, non-GMO tofu and tempeh, beans and legumes.

Honey is nourishing, fortifying and lubricating. It can be added to warm tea, congee or warm grain cereals.

Sea vegetables add important minerals and trace minerals to our body; and help to moisten dryness and soften hardenings (phlegm accumulation) in the body. Try the spectrum of sea vegetables such as nori (the highest in protein), dulse (can eat uncooked), kombu (used in cooking of beans and soups to add umami and minerals), wakame (rich in calcium and magnesium), hijiiki and arame (can help to soften phlegm accumulations). All coastal cultures have included sea vegetables into their diets.

Bitter greens and vegetables - The bitter flavor is cooling and cold in thermal nature, and supports the clearing of heat and fire, dries dampness and phlegm. Bitter greens can be useful when there is a phlegm condition. The bitter flavor is important to include on your plate. Choose from the wide variety of foods such as: dandelion greens, escarole and other chicories, lettuce stems, artichokes and asparagus, all types of rapini or rabe.

Milder notes of bitter can be found in celery leaves and cardoons, as well as mature turnips and rutabagas. For a strong medicinal dose of bitter, try cooked bitter melon.

A note of caution: If you or your patient is yin deficient and dry, be careful with bitter greens, as they dry dampness and are cold. However, with a constitutionally hot-natured person, bitter greens should be a staple.

Immune-System Support

The following herbs and medicinal foods have tonic effects supporting the immune system when you are feeling well (not when you are sick):

- Astragalus is best when you are healthy and can be added to soups, stews or teas. It is very woody, so it cannot be eaten. Do not take astragalus with any indication of cold or flu symptoms.
- Mushrooms including button and cremini, shitake, maitake, oyster, cordyceps and other varieties are well-known for their immune-boosting properties. Add them into soups, stews, stir-fries or roasted. They are delicious and add umami deep flavor into your cooking.
- Red dates and goji berries nourish *qi* and blood. They can be added to teas, soups and stews.

What to Eat When You Start to Feel Sick

If symptoms start with a sore throat, aches and pains, fever or chills:

- Follow the general guidelines above in foods and cooking styles to avoid. [[See Pt. 1 as well.](#)]
- It is crucial not to overeat to take the stress off your digestive system.
- Cooling and pungent foods such as radish, daikon, broccoli, lightly steamed pungent greens including arugula and mustard greens.
- Pungent and cooling herbs can be added to cooked foods or utilized in teas. Include peppermint, spearmint, lonicera buds (*lian qiao*) and honeysuckle buds (*jin yin hua*) in equal amounts.
- Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate by eating steamed foods, soups, soupy dishes and warm teas. Green tea is more cooling than black teas.
- Gargle with warm salt water 3-4 times per day.

If feeling sick with mild sore throat and chills among the presenting symptoms:

- Follow the general guidelines above in foods and cooking styles to avoid. [[See Pt. 1 as well.](#)]
- Do not overeat.
- Eat a combination of warming and cooling pungent foods, as described above and also include: scallions, chives, spring onions, shallots, small amounts of garlic (garlic is very warming and easily aggravates a wind condition), and ginger (fresh or dried).
- Eat a combination of pungent / aromatic spices and herbs, which warm with added small amounts of cooling pungents to balance. Include nettles (fresh or dried as in a tea), shiso leaf (*zi su ye* or otherwise known as Japanese basil), basil, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, caraway seeds (disperse cold), sage and thyme.
- Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate.
- Take hot Epsom salt baths until sweating and then go directly to bed.

If mild, dry cough is a symptom:

- Continue to follow general guidelines. [[See Pt. 1 as well.](#)]
- Avoid all hot, warming and drying foods including spicy and heating foods, beans and legumes (which are drying), baked goods, crackers, chips and popcorn.
- Hydrate! Water is key. Make it warm or hot. Drink often.
- Cook using methods such as steaming, boiling or lightly braising. Eat easy-to-digest foods.
- Include foods that support the lung and lubricate: slippery greens such as spinach or chard. Tofu, sea vegetables, almonds, sesame seeds both black and white, almonds, pine nuts and walnuts. Include pears, watercress, figs, honey (aids in lubrication) and lotus root.
- In addition to water, also drink tea that includes lily bulbs, mulberry leaf, chrysanthemum.

For mild cough with phlegm:

- Follow general guidelines. [[See Pt. 1 as well.](#)]
- Include foods that are neutral in thermal nature and clear phlegm: mustard greens,

mushrooms, radishes and daikon, carrots, rice, oats, pine nuts, almonds and small amounts of onion (cooked), sea vegetables, cooked napa cabbage. Utilize fresh ginger root grated into hot water; use zest of citrus.

- Kumquats can be cooked down with honey to make syrup that can be mixed in hot water to help clear phlegm.

Take-Home Points

This article is meant to provide you with another perspective on how we can nourish and protect our health with food. The Chinese have a saying: "Food heals and medicine is food." There are many traditions that honor nurturing life. The food we eat and how we eat is one of the most powerful. Let's do what we can to nurture and nourish ourselves in this time.

Feeling overwhelmed already and not sure where to start? Take it slow. It is important to pace ourselves for the long haul. Our mental and emotional health is crucial in maintaining our physical health. We are in this together, throughout the world. By sharing our strengths and asking for help when we feel at sea, we can help ourselves and each other maintain our health, vitality and well-being.

Editor's Note: [Part 1](#) of this article appeared in the June issue and discussed a variety of other suggestions to support a healthy, harmonized stomach and spleen.

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