

Medicated Diet Therapy for Cardiovascular Disease

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Angina, chest pain, dizziness, palpitation and high blood pressure are symptoms associated with cardiovascular disease. Medical science dedicates a great deal of effort and expense developing drugs, devices and procedures to combat the most common cause of death in both men and women. These symptoms can be controlled, prevented and treated successfully using medicated diet therapy.

Medicated diet therapy is a special branch of Chinese herbology which uses food products according to their herbal properties to treat diseases. This combines the effectiveness of herbal medicine with the familiarity of foodstuffs. Many common foods have herbal properties, and many of the herbs first identified in source texts were barley, yams, dates, walnuts, figs, grapes and sesame seeds. Medicated diet is divided into two components, namely dietary drugs and medicinal recipes. Dietary drugs are individual foods. They are used to complement other, more detailed modalities. Medicinal recipes are complex formulae which are effective alone and also potentiate other treatments.

The most revered ancient texts of acupuncture and herbal medicine include dietary prescriptions. For example, in the *Treatise on Cold-Induced Diseases*, rice porridge is recommended to be taken concurrently with the first prescription of *gui zhi tang*.

The ingredients of medicated recipes are selected according to classifications defined in traditional herbology. These are according to the nature of the flavors and the associated organs. Sweet, sour, bitter, salty, bland and spicy determine types of herbal function and target particular organs. For example sour ingredients target the liver, while bitter ingredients target the heart and are anti-toxic in action.

The nature of food refers to indications of metabolic response and determine potential side effects. These are described as cold, cool, neutral, warm and hot. Red chili pepper is hot in nature. If applied to the skin, a sensation of warmth will be perceived. When ingested, it will produce an elevation of body temperature. It can cause increase of night sweats, but is useful in treating chills. Mint leaf is used to treat sore throat. Its cool nature produces the familiar sensation associated with mint flavoring.

Ingredients are also selected according to their roles in the actions of the recipe. These are categorized as follows: chief, deputy, assistant and envoy. The chief ingredient in a recipe determines the recipe's main function. An example would be meat in any recipe. The deputy supports the chief action and adds a secondary function. This would be the beans in chili con carne. Assistants enhance the effect of the chief or deputy (helping assistant). They can also reduce harshness or toxicity (opposing assistant). Onions, which improve the function of *qi*-tonifying meats such as beef, are helping assistants. Fresh ginger is a very potent antidotal and will neutralize actual poisons found in herbs and

foods, as an opposing assistant. The envoy directs the formula to a specific anatomical location and harmonizes the flavors of the recipe. Round-grain polished rice is sweet and neutral. It harmonizes the flavors of recipes. It also activates the middle burner, which makes it an ideal envoy.

After differential diagnosis using tongue and pulse signs, dietary drugs are selected, and the chief, deputy, assistants and envoys chosen. For example, a patient presents symptoms of chilled extremities and a desire for warm liquids, accompanying palpitations. A pale bluish or swollen tongue accompanied by slow pulse indicates *yang* deficiency or cold accumulation. Treatment should tonify *yang* and disperse cold.

The treatment of cardiovascular disease is one of the more important uses of medicated diet therapy. Coronary artery disease is considered to be an excellent target from the aspects of prevention, cure and recovery. Treatment falls into two subcategories: individual foods, and medicinal recipes.

Coronary artery disease is differentiated by TCM into two categories: excess and deficiency. The main dietary drugs for the heart are *shan zha*, *xie bai*, *bai he*, *long yan rou*, *sang ren*, *fu ling*, *suan zao ren*, *ju hua*, *rou gui*, *gan jiang*, *da suan*, *kun bu* and *hai zao*. These are used alone for blood stasis, *qi* deficiency, *yin* deficiency, *yang* deficiency, *qi* stasis and phlegm stasis. Dietary drugs are taken as snacks, condiments or flavoring for rice porridge. More complicated recipes are offered for comprehensive treatments.

For example: hawthorn and wild garlic porridge is used to treat obvious [precordial](#) pain with *qi* deficiency. Sargasso, soybean and kelp soup treats coronary disease accompanied by hypertension and high cholesterol. Ginseng, red sage and hawthorn spirits treats blood stasis and *qi* deficiency. Honeyed Extract for Nourishing the Heart treats deficient *yin* and *qi*, as well as blood stasis.

The best way to take advantage of food herbology is to prescribe daily menus which offer more options than breakfast, lunch and dinner. Here are some examples:

Breakfast: Red date and wheat-berry rice porridge. This wholesome nutty porridge strengthens and regulates the heart *qi*. Red date is the chief. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the heart, spleen and stomach. In this recipe, it nourishes the heart *qi*. Wheat berry is the deputy. It is sweet and cool, and activates the heart and lung. In this recipe, it regulates the heart *qi*.

Lunch: Carrot, macrostem onion and celery porridge. This savory rice porridge is especially effective to treat coronary disease accompanied by precordial discomfort. Macrostem onion is the chief. It is spicy bitter and warm. It activates the lung, heart, stomach and large intestine. In this recipe, it regulates the *qi* in the chest. Carrot is the deputy. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the lung and spleen, and tonifies the five organs. In this recipe, it strengthens the heart. Celery is also a deputy. It is sweet, bitter and cool. It activates the stomach and liver. In this recipe, it regulates the blood vessels.

Dinner: Saffron and black-chicken rice porridge. This savory porridge nourishes the *yin* and invigorates the blood. Black chicken is a chief ingredient. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the liver and kidney. In this recipe, it nourishes the *yin*. Saffron is the other chief ingredient. It is spicy and warm, and activates the heart and liver. In this recipe, it invigorates and nourishes the blood. Round-grain polished rice is the envoy. It is sweet and neutral, and activates the spleen and stomach. It harmonizes the ingredients.

This menu offers a variety of dietary drugs presented in the most effective manner to support other treatment. The ingredients used in medicated diet are common foods that are readily available in grocery stores. Medicated diet therapy can be frequently used in conjunction with other modalities of traditional Chinese medicine. By including it in treatment of heart disease, the practitioner can potentiate the effectiveness of herb and acupuncture prescriptions and improve their outcome.

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