

## It Pays to be a Foodie

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If there is an inner foodie in you, just waiting to burst out—this article is for you!

Do you want to know how I know? I'm that girl. My middle name might as well be "Foodie." I love food! And if my patients are any indication, many of them do as well. I get asked about food and diet every day in my practice. I bet you do too.

Your TCM education has given you a very unique perspective on food. You have lots of great information that you can, and should, be sharing with your patients. This information is valuable and it increases the value of the services you provide to your patients. Properly applied, your knowledge about food and diet should contribute to your practice's bottom line. Right?

In this article, I'm going to teach you how being "Foodie" can improve your patient outcomes and increase your practice income. Using this knowledge, combined with skills I've taught in previous articles, you can actually give yourself a raise! My raise was about \$500 per month.

What you already know:

Pattern diagnosis. That's easy enough, right? Ask questions, take pulses, look at tongues. You've got that down.

Explaining the "Spleen Happy Meal" isn't a problem either. We prefer our patients eat vegetables slightly cooked instead of raw. Avoid icy cold drinks. Don't eat too many foods that "tonify your damp," like ice cream, butter, cheese, etc.

We are also great at throwing out a few well-known food items for certain conditions: dark leafy vegetables and beets for blood deficiency, watermelon to drain damp, goji berries for eye problems, etc.

What's missing:

If you follow the "share bits and pieces along the way as needed" approach it's hard to fully educate the patient and inevitably they forget what you said. So I felt like I needed a system to teach patients about food therapy, instead of just sharing bits and pieces along the way as they asked. My problem was that I didn't have time to talk to my patients in depth about diet at every visit.

Since patterns are always changing, it doesn't make sense to have a one-time dietary education session and have the patient think what you told them should be their diet for life. Patients need to know you have dietary advice and treatment strategies for acute problems, chronic problems, temporary conditions like pregnancy, and even natural aging and progression throughout life.

We need a system:

After thinking long and hard, and working on it more hours than I care to admit, I've developed a very solid system for my clinic, and now I'm going to share it with you. Here's what I recommend:

### Initial Appointment

I have the patient bring in a one-week food diary so I can start with a baseline of their current dietary habits. This is really helpful because it helps me know my starting point. Also, I have the patient fill out a full TCM intake form to determine their TCM pattern. I usually email this to them when they schedule their consultation.

At their initial appointment, I hand them a notebook. On the first page of the notebook, I introduce myself and give general TCM food recommendations for a "Spleen Happy Meal" approach to eating—along with a grocery list of Spleen-happy foods.

Next, we review their pattern intake form. Once their pattern is determined, I print out a grocery list of foods the patient should add to their "Spleen Happy Meal" plan-based on pattern presentation. At the top of this list, I explain symptoms that may be related to the pattern. These lists are already created in my computer with foods for the following patterns:

YIn Deficiency	Damp Cold	Qi Stagnation
Dryness	Phlegm Cold	Toxicity
Heat	Phlegm Heat	Food Stagnation
Wind/Heat	Qi Deficiency	Wind
Wind/Cold	Yang Deficiency	Yang Rising
Wind/Damp	Blood Stagnation	Shen Disturbance
Damp	Blood Deficiency	
Damp Heat	Essence Deficiency	

Once I've determined significant patterns for the patient, I print out the appropriate grocery lists and add them to the patient's notebook.

### Follow-Up Education

In the first visit, I give them grocery lists for their baseline pattern. But I don't want their education to stop there. I've created a series of follow-up emails to teach the patient when to make dietary changes. (Learn how to manage a series of emails in my previous article: "The Monkey on Your Back.")

Make sure your emails speak the patient's language and not just TCM. I've made the subject of subsequent emails relate to CONDITIONS that could be related to specific TCM patterns. You've got to be creative so your email actually gets opened. Here is an example of a series of emails you could send out:

#1: Lunch Ideas for your Irritable Spouse

#2: What Nursing Moms Should Eat

- #3: The Bad Breath Elimination Diet
- #4: How to Eat During Menopause
- #5: Need to Perk UP your Libido?
- #6: Just What the TCM Doctor Ordered—After Surgery
- #7: Are Cold Achy Joints Getting You Down?
- #8: Get rid of Smelly GAS Fast!

In the email, I talk a little bit about the symptoms and how they relate to TCM. I give a few food examples, and I share a recipe.

I don't give the whole grocery list for these TCM conditions in the educational emails. I give just enough to pique the patient's interest. The real goal is to educate the patient that patterns in the body are ever changing with life. AND—I want them to know when to call me for a follow-up food consultation.

Follow-ups are really easy and take 20-30 minutes. They bring their notebook and I print out a new grocery list based on their current pattern presentation. If the patient is really sick, we can do this by phone and I email them the grocery list and have them print two copies—one to take to the grocery store and one to keep in their notebook for future reference. At the top of each pattern-related grocery list, I describe symptoms that would be present with this pattern.

## How To Make Money From The System

### #1: New Patients:

Food therapy is a great way to bring in new patients. Many people are afraid of needles, but everyone loves food. You can do presentations on food therapy in your community. In fact, you can go back to all the places you've already done presentations and tell them you have something NEW! Most of the time your new "Foodie Patients" will turn into acupuncture patients.

I've also incorporated this food therapy system into my program for new acupuncture patients. New patients see me for a minimum of six weeks. I add food therapy into their initial six-week cycle. When you see a new patient and book them for their first six visits, they love hearing that food therapy will be a part of their treatment plan.

### #2: Reactivating Old Patients

This is a really great way to reactivate long, lost patients. Let them know you have something NEW! Send out an email, letter or postcard inviting them in for a food evaluation. This is a great thing to do at the change of seasons. I like to send recipes for things like common cold, sore throat, arthritis, etc.

Idea: If they are existing patients who already get acupuncture, you could offer a FREE food analysis with their next visit.

You can do it too:

TCM food therapy has always been a favorite subject of mine to study. I've spent years reading great books, looking up information on the internet, and putting together my own pattern diagnosis database. There are so many resources available for practitioners.

Find a system that works for you. There are ready-made TCM food lists available if you want a quick way to create a system. Or you can be obsessive and create your own dietary lists via pattern like I did. The main idea is to create a simple way to hand your patients a grocery shopping list based on multiple pattern diagnostics, that is simple and easy to understand.

Blue Poppy makes a printed pad. Acupuncture Media Works has created information cards based on symptoms and seasonal newsletters with dietary information. If you are looking for an automated system to do the work for you, AcuGraph 5 has pattern intake forms and printable, pattern-related grocery lists built in.

What I've learned:

Patients love food therapy! When you teach them that life changes WILL occur, it's natural for them to call for advice when things change. Here's an example:

I had a patient call me in the middle of the day. She felt the first signs of a wind/cold attack coming on. She REMEMBERED an email I'd sent talking about a soup recipe that could turn her cold around right away. I emailed her the recipe and booked an appointment for her to come in.

Most of the time, when the patient calls for quick dietary recommendations, they also book an acupuncture appointment. You'll find that patients value your service more because you have more to offer.

Your Facebook numbers will increase because patients love to share "food as medicine" posts with their friends. (It's really helped my Facebook reach!)

Finally, I love it! The inner "Foodie" in me has found a way to burst out and make a difference in the world. I get to have fun in the kitchen, keep myself and my family healthy, share the love with my patients—AND get a raise in the process.

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