



Getting the Point

The Women's Clinic @ Uxbridge Newsletter

Autumn 2004



There's a definite feeling of Autumn in the air now; even though there's still a lot of heat in the sun (when it deigns to show its face), temperatures are falling and the days are getting shorter. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, Autumn is the time of the Metal element. This is a time when the energy in nature is calming down and declining after the busy outward focus of Summer. The harvest should be in now, and the Metal element reflects this contemplation of stored richness.

This can seem very remote from our busy metropolitan lifestyle, but we can still benefit from respecting the seasons in our lifestyle, particularly in our diet. In Autumn we need to be eating foods to warm us, rather than the cooling salads which were appropriate for Summer. There's a strong focus on nourishing ourselves in this newsletter, with lots of tips for healthy eating, a questionnaire and a case history, and some books to read if your appetite is stimulated.

Keats memorably described Autumn as the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness". Beautiful it may be, but the damp mistiness of Autumn can mean aching joints for some people. We've included an article on cupping (those peculiar marks on Gwyneth Paltrow's back) and how it can help.

Autumn for some people is an exciting time, when they look forward to learning something new at evening classes. Others don't relish the prospect of damp, cold and early evening darkness, and mourn the passing of Summer. If you feel this way, it may be that your Metal element is out of balance, and you would particularly benefit from some acupuncture at this time of year.



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What Has Gwyneth Paltrow Been Up To?



You may have seen photos in the paper a few weeks back of Gwyneth Paltrow attending a premiere with big round bruises on her back. This created a lot of interest in the media about the ancient Chinese therapy of cupping, as well as some pretty strange theories about what it is.

To put the record straight, cupping is a treatment that is still used extensively in China and in some Mediterranean countries. It is used not just in hospitals, but as a home remedy for various conditions. In the UK, it is a technique sometimes used by acupuncturists.

Cupping can be a very effective treatment for many conditions, including pain, the common cold, weakness of the digestive system including diarrhoea and vomiting, and arthritic joints. For the common cold, cupping is used on a point on the upper back, over the lungs.

The traditional method is for a lit alcohol swab to be introduced into a special glass cup with a thick rim, to create a vacuum. The swab is quickly removed and the cup is placed straight onto the skin, where it adheres by suction. This stimulates the flow of blood and Qi energy to the area.

Cupping can be done in a variety of ways, depending on the effect that is

required. One or more cups of different sizes can be used, cups can be left in one place for a while, or moved around once the suction is in place. Having cupping is an interesting experience. If it is necessary to use quite strong suction, your practitioner will discuss whether this is acceptable to you, as strong cupping will leave marks like those on Gwyneth's back. These do fade quite quickly, so don't be put off!

An Easy Lifestyle Change for Autumn



Breakfast. It's the meal our mothers insisted we eat. It's one meal many of us are likely to skip. However, in terms of Chinese medicine and our overall health,

breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

The term means to "break" a "fast". It is important to nourish ourselves in the morning, to energise the body after the long night without nourishment and prepare it for the day's activities. This helps us to function more effectively. Eating a good breakfast helps us avoid sudden drops in energy during the morning, and minimises cravings for chocolate, sugary or fatty snacks.

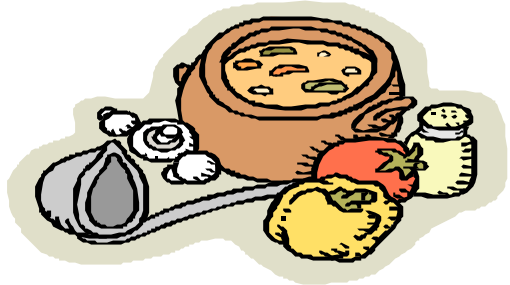
Chinese medical theory says that the *qi* (the body's energy) passes through the Stomach channel between 7.00 and 9.00 o'clock in the morning, and this is the optimum time to nourish the body. Eating well during this time period sets us up to perform better and feel better during the day.

So take the time and make the effort to eat breakfast regularly. You will feel better for it!

More Tips for Healthy Eating¹

Traditional Chinese culture sets great store by healthy eating. The belief is that a healthy appetite and good digestion are vital elements to ensure a long and healthy life.

There are many things we can do to ensure a healthy digestive system. Here are five to try:



Eat three meals a day – including breakfast, and lunch! The Stomach likes regularity. Skipping meals can damage our *qi*, and we will notice this in the way our energy and concentration diminish when we miss meals.

Allow time for eating– it is important that we eat in conditions that allow the Stomach and Spleen to process food. Allow time to eat, and avoid eating “on-the-run” or when stressed. It is also important to avoid activities such as working, reading, or watching TV whilst eating.

Allow time for digestion – many cultures, not only the Chinese, allow time for digestion after eating. This is particularly true of lunch, and the siesta is a period for relaxation and assimilating food. Allowing proper time for digestion – after every meal - enables us to perform our daily tasks more efficiently.

Avoid eating late at night – if we eat too late at night, our bodies must spend energy on digesting, rather than

sleeping. The consequences are that we may feel tired on waking. Continually eating late can lead to sleep difficulties, including insomnia, and may contribute to more serious illness such as diabetes.

Chew your food well – the Chinese say that the “Stomach has no teeth!” By chewing food well, we ensure that the Stomach can assimilate the nutrients and *qi* in the food more easily. Consequently, our energy levels will improve.

Finally, it is important to remember that changes to dietary habits should be introduced slowly and gently. In this way, changes are more likely to become long-term and habitual, and we are more likely to succeed in improving our *qi* in the long term.

Bon appetit!

How Strong is My Digestive System?

Respond to the following statements to gain an insight into the condition of your digestive system:

1. I often feel tired, or tire towards the end of the day, even without overdoing it.
2. I frequently crave sweet foods or “fast-foods”.
3. When I am tired, I find it hard to digest food.
4. I easily get loose bowels.
5. I sometimes get weak legs, and prefer to sit down whenever possible.

If your response is “yes” to at least two of these questions, you may have a tendency towards *qi deficiency* in the Stomach or Spleen. Consider making some of the changes suggested in this newsletter. You may also wish to discuss your condition with your practitioner.

¹ Hicks, Angela (2001) 5 Secrets of Health and Happiness. London: Thorsons.

Case History

A woman of 32 had been suffering from diarrhoea for 3 years. Her stools were always loose. She did not have much energy and it took her some time to get going in the morning as she usually woke feeling muzzy headed. Her skin was rather greasy. Her diet included a lot of fruit. She drank a lot of chilled water, orange juice and milk. She ate meat and fish, and quite a lot of cheese. She also had a sweet tooth and liked chocolate. She had a busy job, and usually stayed at her desk and ate a sandwich or a salad for lunch.

The diagnosis was that her Spleen energy was deficient, leading to a build up of Dampness in the system. Her diet was unfortunately particularly hard on her Spleen energy. The advice given by the practitioner was as follows:

- eat more cooked food and to replace some raw fruit with cooked
- cut down on milk and orange juice, and replace cold drinks with warm or hot
- Not to work while eating (this tends to divert the energy from the Stomach and Spleen when it is most needed there)

She was treated with acupuncture weekly and stuck pretty well to the eating plan, with a few lapses. Improvement started straight away and after 12 weeks she was feeling very energetic and clear headed with normal stools.

Further Reading

If you would like to find out more about Chinese dietary therapy, there are a couple of excellent books available.

Recipes for Self-Healing by Daverick Leggett (ISBN 0-9524640-2-0) has a chapter describing the energetics of

food (whether a food is hot, cold etc), but the bulk of the book is devoted to delicious recipes with their energetic actions. If your practitioner tells you, for example, to eat foods to Nourish Blood, you will be able to find various recipes to do this. Alternatively, you can just try the recipes!

5 Secrets of Health and Happiness by Angela Hicks (ISBN 0-00-711069-3) devotes a long chapter to the topics of how to have a balanced diet, and how to eat healthily. Many of the tips presented in this newsletter come from this interesting and helpful book.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Maggie Bavington, Liz Cook, and Beverley de Valois. We are a group of practitioners who trained at the College of Integrated Chinese Medicine. We are all members of the British Acupuncture Council. We practice both the Five Element and Traditional Chinese Medicine styles of acupuncture. We are all committed to ongoing supervision and training and sharing insights from our particular specialities in the interest of better care for our patients. These currently include women's health, pain relief, musculo-skeletal conditions, addiction and detox and acupuncture research.

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