

Winterize Your Body - Eat for the Season

By Sifu Frank Versagi

As Winter approaches and the cold winds blow, the powerful, warm Yang energy that is usually in our atmosphere and all around us starts to deplete. It's not a bad thing, it's just a natural course of events thing. Yang energy refers to one half of the natural laws of balance, harmony, and polarity, which is known as the Yin and Yang Principle. Yin is soft, Yang is hard; Yin could be considered the negative charge; Yang, the positive; Yin, cool; Yang, hot; thus, Yin predominates in the Wintertime and Yang in the Summertime. Since the energy balance in our air has shifted to soft or cool in the Winter and you're not breathing in the usual amount of Yang energy to warm you up, you must compensate for that depletion by eating more Yang or high energy foods. Our organs also have this Yin/Yang balance to them. Each organ must maintain a good balance of cool and warm energy. There are specific organs that are considered Yin organs and others are Yang. Generally the hollow organs, such as the lungs and stomach are Yin, and solid organs such as the kidneys and spleen are Yang. Since the Yang energy outside our body due to Wintertime is lessened, correspondingly so too is the Yang energy inside our bodies; hence, it naturally follows that the Yang organs need to be tonified during Wintertime.

Here are some food suggestions to help crank up the solid Yang organs and Winterize your body: eat more spicy foods, as long as you can tolerate them; include scallions, parsley, garlic, ginger, and Congee, which is rice porridge, in your diet. (You can find a good recipe for Congee at www.shao-lin.net, then click on newsletters, and then click on December's newsletter). Lose the red meat for the Winter, your body uses way too much energy trying to digest it, energy that could be used to keep you warm; no greasy or fried foods, for the same reason; no pepis's, coke's or diet versions thereof, way too much sugar and the crash after you come down from the sugar rush must be compensated by a blast of your own sugars causing your body to do a mad dash to catch up. Believe it or not, no water melons or citrus fruits, these are cold (energy wise) foods and they don't warm you from the inside out.

Plenty of soups. Hunan hot and sour soup is an excellent choice. You can find a good recipe for this soup at www.yogajournal.com/health/51_1.cfm.

Almonds, mung beans; dates and figs are also an excellent source of natural energy.

Good Winter teas include Licorice tea, hot lemon and mint tea.

The king of all Winter teas is Holy Basil or tulsi tea; it's also the number one tea to help reduce a fever. And as always, green tea should be a staple of your diet, plenty of antioxidants and other good "stuff" in green tea that naturally helps to detoxify your body.

If you're a "must have coffee in the morning" type of person, try peppermint tea instead, it's a great eye opener.

Ice water is not a good idea in the Wintertime, try drinking room temperature water instead, it's much better for you than shocking your insides with freezing cold water. Try to lose the ice cubes, drink as many beverages as you can without them. Remember, we're trying to keep the insides warm, not cold. Here are some good herbs for the Wintertime to help Yang you up: Black Cardamon, Caltrop, Dodder, Teasel, Broomrape, Horny Goat Weed, Eucommia, Dandelion Root, Spotted Deer, and Chamomile. Most herbs, since they are nature's bounty, have no side effects; however, if you're currently taking medication for a medical condition, check with your physician to make sure there are no contra-indications to taking any of these herbs.

To strengthen and warm the digestive tract in the Wintertime, a potent herbal mixture called triphala can really do the trick. Triphala is a combination of amalaki, haritaki, and bibhitaki. Triphala provides nutrients and pushes out toxins from the body. Triphala improves liver function, helps purify the blood and removes accumulated toxins. It is also high in Vitamin C and linoleic oil. Not recommended for pregnant women, people with chronic liver conditions, or for those taking blood thinners.

If you get stiff and achy, tendonitis sets in, here's a bonus herb you might only be able to find in your local Chinatown that works well for the inflammation: Chin Koo Tieh Shang Wan.

Another difficult to find herb, but well worth the hunt, that is extremely helpful for allergy sufferers is Bi Yan Pian.

Here's a couple other helpful hints for Winterizing your body: As singers, tai chi and qigong practitioners, and martial artists know, you must breathe deep into your diaphragm and even below that into your lower abdominal area, (the Chinese refer to this as the tan tiem), to naturally turn up the temperature in your internal furnace. This deep breathing is analogous to throwing a log on the fire; your center will warm up and the heat will spoke out from your body's center to the other areas of your body. Visualize bringing your breath to life, feel your breath as it comes in your nose, goes down your throat, passes by your heart, fills your lungs, continues its downward path to just past your navel about two inches and ends in your tan tiem. As you breathe deeply, take a moment and listen to the sounds of life, clear your mind as much as possible and just be for a moment. Deep breathing does wonders for you. Chinese monks and the Taoist Priests say that deep abdominal breathing is nature's way to good health and longevity.

There's an acupressure point on the back of your neck, a couple inches above where the spine ends, a very powerful point for healing; however, very susceptible to wind and cold. Wear your scarf, keep the back of the neck covered as often as possible; even if you're inside but still chilly, keep the neck covered for a while.

Winterizing your body also includes your mind. Since the connection between mind/body is well established, we must not neglect covering the mental aspects of good health.

Lose the overload. Cut out some of the constant stimulation your mind and nervous system receives. Try to lessen the noise your brain has to digest, because bombarding your brain with too much sensory input deprives your body of energy it could be using to help keep you warm. Your brain must use energy to listen, digest, and then react to whatever noise it is you're cramming into it. Try to make a conscious effort to decrease the noise and visual inputs. Make sure you do ching jing wu wei (just sitting still and doing nothing) whenever you can, which definitely includes deep abdominal breathing at these times. Your body will take the quiet time to restore its natural internal energy. You can make yourself feel better, the natural way, by keeping yourself warm from the inside out just by following these Winterizing tips. Bring your body into harmony with the season at hand; you'll have a healthier, calmer, more productive Winter.

Peace and harmony in your life really does come from the inside, out; not the outside, in.

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