

25 Traditional Chinese Dietary Principles
For Optimum Weight, Health & Vitality

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Holistic Health Report

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**25 Time-Tested Chinese Dietary
Principles You Can Apply *Today* For
Optimum Weight, Health & Vitality**

Matthew Scott B.Ac, MA

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Feel free to pass this report on to anyone you know
who wants to improve their health and wellbeing.

About the author

Matthew Scott is a professionally trained Chinese medicine practitioner from Australia. In 2000, after ten years in professional practice, Matthew went to China to further his studies and immerse himself in the culture for a few months. He's been there ever since.

Visit Matthew's website for classic Chinese exercises, techniques and exercise programs to enhance the dietary principles in this report.

www.chinese-holistic-health-exercises.com

Note: The information in this report is not intended to replace advice, diagnoses or treatment from your doctor or other health professional. Always consult your doctor or health professional before starting or changing any dietary or exercise program.

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Introduction

Chinese doctors have been analyzing food and its effect on the body for at least 2500 years. The result is a complete system of food classification and food cures known as Traditional Chinese Dietary Therapy. It includes specific guidelines on how to select foods, how to combine them, how to cook them and how to balance your diet according to your state of health, body type, the weather, seasons and other factors.

Chinese doctors have long known there is no single diet suitable for everyone, and this is precisely why most of the fad diets you read and hear about in the West are just fads. Everyone is unique - physically, mentally and emotionally - and therefore we have unique dietary needs. However, there are certain traditional Chinese dietary guidelines that everyone can follow to improve their health and wellbeing, hence this report.

Below are twenty-five practical, time-tested Chinese dietary principles you can begin applying before your next meal to improve digestion, elimination, energy, weight control and other aspects of your health. Theoretical concepts of traditional Chinese medicine – on which Chinese dietary therapy is based – are not discussed in detail. If you wish to delve deeper into the subject, a list of Chinese Dietary Therapy books has been provided at the end of the report.

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Before meals

These methods prepare your digestive system for food and help facilitate smooth digestion. Poor, sluggish digestion leads to food stagnation, bloating, putrefaction, constipation, weight gain and many other problems.

Do the abdominal lift

If you're looking to improve digestion *and* lose weight, exercise before breakfast. As you haven't eaten for maybe 10-12 hours, your body relies on its fat stores for energy. One exercise that is highly recommended before meals, and especially before breakfast, is the Abdominal Lift. It's easy to do and takes a couple of minutes only. Basically, it involves using your abdominal muscles to lift your abdomen up and towards your spine, and holding, then releasing it. For full, illustrated instructions, including benefits and tips, see:

<http://chinese-holistic-health-exercises.com/abdominal-exercises.html>

Do slow, deep breathing

Eating while emotionally upset, angry or highly stressed is very bad for your digestion, so wait till you calm down before eating, or skip the meal if you're in a very emotional state. To help you relax, sit or stand and do a few minutes of slow, deep breathing in a quiet place before you eat. You can also do this even if you already feel calm and relaxed.

Drink green tea

Green tea warms and prepares your digestive system for food. Drink one cup of loose-leaf green tea 10-20 minutes before you eat - particularly beneficial if you know you'll be eating heavy foods like meat, or fried foods.

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What to eat

Outlined below are some of the main traditional Chinese dietary principles related to eating for optimum health and vitality. Some of these principles may contradict what you've previously learnt or been told – remember though that this system has developed and been refined *and* trial-and-error tested on literally millions of people over at least 2500 years. Simply put: What works is still in use today – what doesn't was discarded long ago. These principles of healthy eating are also applicable to *everyone*, regardless of nationality or location, and may easily be adapted to suit local foods and conditions.

- Adopt a diet of mostly grains, like rice; bean products, like tofu; vegetables (especially leafy green, yellow and orange kinds), and some fruits.
- Eat small amounts only of meat (finely chopped or sliced), seafood, eggs and dairy products. Although very nutritious, proteins, if overeaten, can clog up your digestive system. One serving of a single type of protein, 3 or 4 times a week, is generally sufficient for most people.
- Eating too much spicy and oily food heats up your digestive system, leading to such problems as constipation, diarrhea and acne. The traditional Chinese diet is simple and bland – plain rice, noodles, soups, lots of lightly steamed or stir-fried vegetables, and small amounts of meat. Garlic and ginger are commonly used in Chinese cooking, not just for flavor, but also as powerful digestive aids. Chilli is often used in hot, humid climates as it induces sweating, which cools the body and releases toxins.
- Raw foods like vegetables and fruits, when consumed *excessively*, cool and weaken your digestive system, causing such problems as bloating, watery stools and lack of energy. Therefore, according to Chinese medical theory, meals should primarily be cooked and eaten warm. Cooking is a kind of pre-digestion process that makes it easier for digestion to occur, compared to cold, raw foods, which require more digestive power to break them down. Suitable cooking methods are steaming and stir-frying as they cook quickly and lightly while still retaining nutrients.
- Elderly people should eat 4 or 5 small meals a day as their digestive systems no longer cope well with big meals. A typical small Chinese meal might be a bowl of noodles with some finely chopped, steamed vegetables on top and a dash of soy sauce for flavoring. Anyone wanting to **lose weight** should also try this approach, i.e. eating frequent, small amounts, as it prevents the sort of hunger that leads to over-eating and weight gain. This writer has lived in Southern China since 2000 and sees very few overweight Chinese people.

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During meals

Eat slowly and chew well

Digestion begins in the mouth. Eating slowly and chewing food thoroughly before swallowing ensures smooth, complete digestion.

Focus on eating

Reading or engaging in heated or lively discussions or any other mental activity that takes your mind away from the process of eating also impedes digestion.

Drink green tea

A cup of warm-hot green tea during meals benefits digestion, helps with the breakdown of heavy foods like meat, and dissolves any oil and fat used in cooking. For more on the benefits and uses of green tea, including how to make a cup of loose-leaf green tea, see:

<http://www.chinese-holistic-health-exercises.com/chinese-green-tea-benefits.html>

Don't drink cold drinks

Consuming cold drinks, especially iced ones, at any time, but particularly while eating, is very bad for digestion. The digestive process requires heat to break down what you eat. Cold is, by nature, slowing and contracting - therefore cold drinks, *and* very cold foods like ice cream, slow and impede digestion, causing digestive upsets, abdominal pain and discomfort.

Don't overeat

Be kind to your digestive organs and bowels and stop eating when you are about 75% full. Overeating greatly impairs your stomach and intestines, causing indigestion, bloating, sluggishness, constipation, putrefaction, gas and other problems.

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After meals

Don't rush straight back into any kind of mental or heavy physical activity after meals – spend 10-20 minutes do the following first:

Massage your abdomen

Rubbing your abdomen after meals is very beneficial for digestion and absorption of nutrients. It's also an excellent preventative and remedy for digestive disorders. Do it while standing still, or while taking a slow, leisurely stroll. For illustrated instructions, full benefits, and tips on doing abdominal and stomach massage, see: <http://chinese-holistic-health-exercises.com/stomach-massage.html>

Take a slow walk

Whenever you leave a restaurant in China, the staff thank you for coming then say, “man zou”, meaning, “walk slowly”. A slow, aimless stroll (*not* a power walk) after meals, even for just 10 minutes, greatly enhances digestion and nutrient absorption, especially when combined with abdominal rubbing.

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General principles

Make breakfast your biggest meal

This ensures plenty of energy throughout the day - going to work on an empty stomach is a bad habit. If you think you don't have time for a good breakfast, *make* time. Your meals should become progressively smaller throughout the day. According to Chinese dietary wisdom, eating a big dinner, especially of heavy food, and/or eating just before bed are bad habits. The result is incomplete digestion of food, bloating, constipation, sluggishness, poor sleep and other problems.

Eat at fixed, regular times

Your body likes and responds to regularity, not just in mealtimes, but sleeping and working too. If you doubt this, next time you take a long trip notice what it does to your eating, sleeping and bowel habits. For optimum health and vitality it's important to establish and maintain regular meal times, sleep times and bowel movements.

Don't drink excessively

This applies to *all* liquids, not just obvious ones like alcohol and coffee. According to Chinese medical theory, drinking any liquid excessively weakens your digestive organs and kidneys. Firstly, all liquids must go through the digestive process – drink too much and you overburden and consequently weaken your digestion, just as overeating does. Secondly, excess liquids don't just *flow* out through your bladder – they require energy from your kidneys to *push* them out. Excessive drinking of any liquid, including water, therefore overburdens your kidneys too.

Don't eat too many dairy foods

Despite what you may have read or been told, commercialized dairy products like milk, yogurt and cheese, are *not* the best sources of calcium, nor are they very healthy. Excessive consumption causes phlegm to build up in the body, clogged colons, allergies and more.

Select foods according to seasons and environmental conditions

Traditional Chinese Medicine, of which Dietary Therapy is a part, emphasizes living in harmony with your surroundings and in accordance with the cycles of nature. With this in mind, it's best to...

- Eat *fresh, local* produce where possible. A fruit grown in another country, in a different season, that's picked before it's ripe, then shipped in cold storage to where you live is energetically inappropriate *and* unhealthy.

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- In the heat of summer eat more cooling, lighter foods such as fruits and steamed vegetables, and less heating, stimulating foods like meats, spices, alcohol and anything fried.
- In the cold of winter eat more warming, nourishing foods like meats, soups, stews, a little alcohol perhaps, and less cooling, summer-type foods.

Select foods according to your state of health and body type

A major strength of traditional Chinese therapies (acupuncture, herbal medicine, dietary therapy, etc) is the tailoring of treatment to precisely match each person's complaint and constitutional body type. For example, if you have acne, constipation, bad breath and a yellow tongue moss (all signs of excess heat in your body), you should avoid foods and drinks which add further heat, such as anything fried, excess meat and alcohol, and eat more cooling foods such as fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, due to the highly individualized nature of traditional Chinese therapies like dietary therapy, it's not possible to advise here *exactly* which foods are suitable for you (or *not* suitable). For specific dietary advice you should consult a qualified health professional with knowledge of Chinese Dietary Therapy, such as a practitioner of traditional Chinese acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine.

Balance is key

Avoid excesses of anything in your diet (and life in general too). Mention has already been made of the problems associated with excessive meat, cold, raw foods, and liquid consumption. According to Chinese dietary wisdom, addiction to any of the five flavors (sweet, salty, bitter, sour, acrid) also creates imbalances in your body and resulting health problems. Of the five flavors, sugar (sweet) in the form of chocolate, cakes, biscuits, candy, ice cream, soft drinks, etc, is probably the biggest Western addiction, causing skin, teeth, weight and other problems.

Don't be fanatical about your diet

Eating should be enjoyable. Obsessing over everything you eat and drink is unnecessary *and* unhealthy. Your body is a remarkable machine with an amazing ability to balance and heal itself *if* you provide the right fuel and the right conditions *most* of the time. Aim for balance and harmony in other aspects of your life too and you'll be rewarded with good health and vitality.

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Regular exercise

Diet and exercise go hand in hand. Focusing on one while neglecting the other is pointless. Naturally, there are many forms of exercise, each with its own benefits and drawbacks. For an outline of the benefits of Chinese style exercise compared to Western forms, see:

<http://chinese-holistic-health-exercises.com/benefit-of-exercise.html>

Summary

To summarize the traditional Chinese guidelines on healthy eating: Eat plenty of vegetables (lightly cooked), a reasonable amount of carbohydrates (rice, noodles, pasta, wholegrain bread), little meat (finely chopped/sliced), some fruit, little sugar and few dairy products. Eat 4 or 5 small meals a day (particularly if you're elderly or overweight), stop eating when you're about 75% full, and don't drink very cold liquids, especially with meals.

Preparing meals according to these guidelines is quick and simple. All you need is a Chinese wok, a pot with a bamboo or stainless steel steamer, a long handled utensil for stir-frying, some basic condiments (soy sauce/sesame oil/cooking wine) and basic seasonings (ginger/garlic/chilli).

Suggested reading

- Chinese System of Food Cures (Henry Lu)
- Prince Wen Hui's Cook (Bob Flaws & Honora Lee Wolfe)
- Arisal of the Clear: A Simple Guide to Healthy Eating According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (Bob Flaws)
- Food is Energy: How To Use It (Geoffrey D. Wilson)

To Your Health!

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