

HEALTH

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TCM: Summer

During the summer, heat and humidity can affect the fluid and electrolyte balance in our bodies. We need additional fluids to cool down, and to replace what is lost through sweating. Always be alert for the warning signs of heat stroke such as nausea, faintness, headaches, muscle weakness and cramps during outdoor activities. It is also a good idea to wear lightweight clothing, drink plenty of fluids, stay in the shade and avoid heavy activity when temperatures are high.

Maintaining a proper body fluid balance is important in TCM at all times – not just in the summer. Other than blood, body fluids include sweat, tears and those present in the organs, tissues and intestines. These help to nourish the body. For example, digestive juices aid in the absorption and distribution of nutrients, and also promote the elimination of wastes.

TCM believes the summer season is when our bodies undergo the most metabolic changes. Modern living provides us with a comfortable air-conditioned environment, but it also

means we are less reliant on the body's natural cooling system. As a result, hot and humid weather has a greater impact on our health. We are more likely to feel lethargic and weak, with decreased appetite, and possibly looser bowels. Young children, the elderly and people with chronic illness are most at risk.

Similar symptoms may also be attributed to disorders of the spleen and may result in water retention or swelling. Herbs such as the coix seed, poria, the winter gourd and corn silk will assist water flow through the body and promote urination.

Some people may experience a low fever, excessive sweating, irritability, sleepiness and yellowish urine – all are summer heat symptoms – disturbing the body's fluid and qi.

Ingredients like American ginseng, watermelon peel and lotus leaf can be used to replenish our strength and promote the production of bodily fluids.

Diet too is important in keeping cool. Recommended foods include melons, vegetables, tomatoes, lotus root, mung bean, duck and fish. Eat in moderation

as overeating – especially frozen and uncooked foods – can lead to indigestion or even diarrhoea. The high temperatures can also cause food to spoil easily.

It is a tradition in summer to make soups for clearing summer heat, eliminating dampness and promoting digestion. For example, prepare winter gourd (800g) by removing the seed and pulp, and chop it into large pieces (don't peel). Wash some lotus leaf (50g) and coix seed (30g). Put the ingredients in a pot with two litres of water, bring to a boil and simmer for approximately one hour or until the ingredients are tender.

Some tea recipes using bamboo leaf (15g), couch grass rhizome (30g) and coix seed (30g) help relieve fatigue and irritability, while smoked plum (50g) and rock sugar help quench excessive thirst and reduce sweating.

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