

SPRING EQUINOX RECOMMENDATIONS

At spring equinox there is a union of yin (the cold inactivity of winter) and yang (the warm, active energy that peaks in summer). Neither is very strong, but the yang energy is now beginning to establish itself as the yin energy diminishes. The earth is regaining warmth and hibernation is over. The clear, upward-moving spring energy of birth, renewal and growth is evident: plants and trees are expressing themselves as their qi moves outward to form leaves and flowers. Gusty, unpredictable winds are prevalent, making allergy symptoms common (these are considered a normal adaptation to spring if they are mild and of short duration).

The liver system and the wood element in Chinese medicine are associated with springtime. The liver energy controls and balances our emotions; if not allowed to flow freely, it can become congested, and anger, irritability, and impatience can arise. In order to harmonize with the qi of spring and avoid liver stagnation, consider following these recommendations:

- **Move the liver qi:** exercise, take a stroll near a body of water, walk aimlessly, stretch
- **Stimulate the liver:** drink lemon water first thing in the morning to detoxify
- **Renew your life:** begin a new healthy practice, make a change
- **Practice happiness:** tickle, giggle, be silly and playful, lighten up
- **Be creative:** begin to implement the ideas and dreams of winter
- **Garden:** dig in the ground, plant and arrange flowers
- **Express yourself:** let your emotions flow, tell people how you feel (but don't go overboard!)
- **Eat smaller, more frequent meals:** don't overeat, avoid late meals

ACCORDING TO CHINESE MEDICINE, the best way for us to maintain health is to have an appropriate **RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ENVIRONMENT.** In addition to acupuncture and Chinese herbs, learning to live harmoniously with natural, seasonal cycles can be a powerful way of promoting our wellness and resolving illness.

If we can **ALLOW OUR BODIES TO ADAPT** to the different seasons, to the qi as it changes throughout the year, then health will flow naturally. Taoists closely observed the **NATURAL QI CYCLES** of 24 different seasons in order to harmonize their energy with that of their environment. The following daily practices and dietary recommendations are based on this tradition.





FOOD RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECIPES

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Green is the color associated with the liver and springtime,

so it's helpful to consume cooked leafy greens to aid in cleansing and rejuvenating the body. Young plants, sprouts, and cereal grains are also beneficial, as they represent the upward movement of spring. The sour taste (vinegar, lemon) is especially good this time of year to invigorate the liver. Now that winter is over, it is time to reduce fat and to eat less red meat and dairy; use lighter cooking methods (less oil) and shorter cooking time. Green tea (the new spring harvest) is especially good to drink now.

Foods to emphasize: eat less of the autumn/winter foods

and incorporate all the new foods of spring such as dark leafy greens (kale, mustard greens, bok choy, collards, dandelion greens), artichokes, cabbage, radish, scallions, peas, fresh ginger and garlic, barley, rice, strawberries, bay leaf, parsley, spring onions, lemons, eggs, sprouts, tangerines.

Avoid: coffee, alcohol, sugar, dairy, fatty and greasy foods, sushi, processed foods, overly spicy foods, large meals.

Breakfast is the springtime of every day, so it's essential that it be a substantial, savory meal during the spring season. The traditional breakfast in many parts of China is rice porridge (congee or jook), which can be plain or with added meat, vegetables, and herbs. Congee is also beneficial when one is ill or recovering from an illness, or to re-regulate the digestive system when eating has been erratic. Congee can be made in a slow cooker or rice cooker overnight (4-8 hours), or on the stovetop (2-4 hours).

Spring Congee

- 2-4 small pork ribs (omit if vegetarian)
- 1 chicken thigh (omit if vegetarian)
- 1 cup rice, uncooked
- 9 cups water (more may be added as needed)
- 4 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 thick slice fresh ginger
- Garnish: sliced green onion and/or chopped cilantro, toasted sesame seeds

Combine all the ingredients, bring to a simmer, and cook on low heat. Take meat off bones at end of cooking, and add back to pot. Season with soy sauce to taste.

Other ingredients to consider adding:

- Black fungus, soaked and thinly sliced (one piece)
- Lotus seeds, soaked (small handful)
- Chinese red dates (5-8 dates)
- Gou qi zi (goji berries), soaked briefly and added at end (small handful)
- Job's tears (yi yi ren) or pearl barley, approx. 1/8 cup (substitute for part of the rice)
- Dried mung beans, washed and soaked briefly, approx. 1/8 cup
- One egg, beaten and stirred in at the end (while congee is still simmering)

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