

Yin Deficiency – Diet Guidelines

In TCM theory, Yin represents the nutritional, cooling, calming, and moistening aspects of the body. A deficiency of Yin generally leads to a relative excess of Yang and symptoms which may include a feeling of heat, restlessness, dryness, sweating, anxiety, or insomnia all of which may have a tendency to worsen in the evening or at night. From a western medical perspective Yin may relate to nutritional, hormonal and other elements in the body which may decline as we age or be damaged in times of disease.

In general, TCM Diet therapy is aimed at consuming highly nutritious and easily digested foods at regular mealtimes. When diagnosed with a Yin deficiency one should follow a calming lifestyle with regular "early to bed" sleep patterns and a nourishing diet which avoids Yang activating foods like hot spicy foods such as cayenne and ginger and stimulating or drying foods such as coffee, tea, and alcohol.

According to traditional Chinese medicine theory, all Yin in the body originates in the Kidneys and then rises to permeate and nourish the rest of the body. Though it's source is kidneys, Yin is also very important for the Heart, Liver and Lungs and syndromes of Yin deficiency may be associated with only one of these organ systems.

Recommendations

About 40% of your meals should consist largely of easily digested complex carbohydrates like grains and starchy root vegetables. Another 40% of the diet should be cooked vegetables and fruit. Proteins should make up the remaining 10 – 20% of the diet. This is meant to be a tonifying diet and should be hearty though not overly rich and greasy. We generally advise people to eat as they would if they had been doing hard, physical labour outside in cold weather for 12 hours a day.

Specific foods for Yin deficiency

Grains: rice, oats, millet, barley, wheat germ, tef, quinoa, amaranth, etc

Dairy: milk, goat milk, eggs, yogurt, etc

Beans: Beans in general but specifically tofu, beans, aduki beans, black beans, mung beans, kidney beans, fava beans
Nuts and Seeds in general but especially black sesame seeds goji berries

Meat products: pork, beef, chicken, duck, etc

Seafood: fish, clam, abalone, oyster, sardines

Seaweeds: spirulina, chlorella

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Vegetables: virtually all vegetables that are not spicy such as onions, especially the starchy and/or green ones

Virtually all fruit

Oils: olive oil, coconut oil, flaxseed oil, almond oil

Foods to avoid or eliminate

The following foods are considered hot and drying which aggravated Yin deficiency.

Hot and spicy herbs including chili pepper, cinnamon, ginger, onions, shallots, leeks, basil, wasabi, garlic

Drinks: coffee, tea, and other spicy, stimulating drinks

Pickles, vinegar (excluding apple cider vinegar),

Meats: Lamb, shrimp, prawns, veal, game birds (these meats are considered hot in nature)

Other: cigarettes, alcohol, recreational stimulants

For those interested in learning more about Chinese Diet therapy, you can pick up a great book called "Healing With Whole Foods", by Paul Pitchford usually available at Chapters.