

Damp-Phlegm Retention – Diet Guidelines

In TCM theory, the retention of dampness refers to a condition of pathogenic water, hyper-viscosity, and stagnation in the body and is the cause of many illnesses. Damp is a yin pathogen that impairs Yang-Qi from circulating and easily causes stagnation of Qi and blood circulation. Symptoms can include a feeling of heaviness, swelling or water retention, distended abdomen, phlegm discharge, nodular masses, loose bowels sinus issues, chronic or recurrent lung problems, obesity, skin conditions of all kinds, oedema, etc. Individuals with a damp constitution often gain weight easily and have sluggish metabolisms and energy.

In general, TCM Diet therapy is aimed at consuming highly nutritious and easily digested foods at regular mealtimes. When diagnosed with Damp-Phlegm retention one should follow a diet that includes foods that reduce the amount of damp and phlegm produced in the body especially dairy, refined carbohydrates, processed foods, excess raw vegetables and fruit, sugar, alcohol and cold or chilled foods. Besides avoiding damp generating foods, including more foods that facilitate its removal from the body is also important. These foods generally include aromatic and spicy herbs such as ginger, basil, thyme, mint, etc.

General 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 cooked vegetables. Proteins can make up the remaining 10 – 20% of the diet.

Specific foods for Damp-Phlegm Retention

Whole grains – rice, oats, barley, rye, millet, buckwheat. Avoid wheat and all white or processed flours. Job's tear barley and amaranth are especially good for damp retention.

Cooked vegetables, steamed is best. Spicy vegetables such as onions, garlic, green onions, radishes, leeks, etc are extra good and clearing dampness.

Mushrooms are also good for damp conditions.

Beans: All are good but especially mung beans and adzuki beans.

Lean Meats: Avoid pork, processed meats, bacon, and any meats that are excessively rich or fatty.

Spices: Most spices are excellent for dampness but specifically fresh ginger, mustard, cloves, cardamon, nutmeg, thyme, basil, etc.

Foods that make damp retention worse.

Dairy: All, including yogurt and eggs.

Sweets: Avoid all sugar and most sweeteners with the exception of small amounts of honey, xylitol and stevia. Avoid chocolate, including dark.

Nuts and nut butters: Minimize or better yet avoid.

Meat products: pork, processed, rich or greasy meats.

Vegetables: excess salad or raw vegetables.

Oils: Oils and fatty foods should be kept to a minimum.

Cold or chilled foods: including iced beverages, smoothies, and ice water.

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.