

Using food as medicine

Food has a powerful effect on our quality of life. Whether we realise it or not, it is intertwined in all areas of our lives, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, environmentally and of course, socially.

Dr Ludmila Vassilieva (MBBS, MD, PhD., GP, Homeopath) is a certified doctor specialising in homeopathy. Having practised medicine for over 25 years, she is the first licensed homeopathic doctor in Dubai. She writes a fortnightly column for Tabloid.

Today: Eating for healing

If you choose your meals properly they could be about healing as well as nutrition



Just as we use food as a means of socialising, to feed emotional tendencies, or to satisfy physical hunger, we can use food to treat and prevent disease and promote health and optimal wellness.

There are numerous theories on how a balanced diet can improve health. However, what constitutes a balanced diet varies greatly depending on the individual and the properties we look at when choosing foods. In addition to nutritional value in the traditional terms, generally, certain foods can be labeled according to their energies and flavours, as good for digestion or recommended for coughs and asthma, for example.

Eastern food groups

We know for instance that foods such as oranges contain vitamin C and are good for the common cold, and that dairy foods contain calcium which is good for the bones. Yet, according to ancient Eastern philosophy, these foods also have certain energy properties, classified as hot, warm, cool or cold, as well as distinct flavors categorised as sweet, bitter, sour, pungent or salty, and even additional specific healing properties.

- Cool and cold foods such as soybeans, cabbage, pears and squash calm the vital organs and are recommended for combating hot diseases such as fever and hypertension.
- Warm and hot foods include beef, chicken, alcohol, mango and chillis which stimulate the vital organs, generate body heat and help abate conditions like anaemia, and fatigue.
- Corn, peas, dates and licorice are examples of sweet foods which disperse stagnant energy, promote circulation, nourish vital energy and harmonise the stomach.
- Bitter foods such as rhubarb, apricots, and celery balance excess dampness and purge the bowels.
- Sour foods include olives, plums, apples and litchis and help solidify the contents of the digestive tract and are useful for treating diarrhea and excessive perspiration and remedying prolapse of the colon.
- Foods like kelp, duck, abalone and barley are salty foods which soften and moisten tissues and are useful in treating tuberculosis of the lymph nodes and other symptoms involving hardening of muscles and glands.
- Pungent foods such as ginger, garlic, rice bran and leeks induce perspiration, neutralise and disperse toxins and promote energy circulation.
- Ginger is used to aid digestion, for deficient cold digestive weakness, indigestion and vomiting as well as helpful in treating anorexia.

- Carrots help eliminate flatulence
- Wheat is cooling and used with fevers and to help clear the digestive tract.
- Yogurt and honey are beneficial for the heart and lungs.
- Aduki beans act as a diuretic and curative for edema and gout.

As with any natural approach to health and healing, to reap the ultimate healing benefits of food, it is important to look at diet individually and holistically, in combination with your own physical, mental, spiritual and emotional tendencies as well as the environmental factors to which one is exposed. For example, while wheat is known to be helpful for clearing the digestive tract, if one is gluten intolerant, wheat would not be recommended. Not all foods are good for all individuals. Ginger may aid digestion but it is considered warming and therefore people with a warmer body composition or intolerance to spicy foods may not tolerate ginger.

Creating your menu

So is food, strictly speaking medicine? Good doctors and healers throughout history have known that just as food continually builds our bodies, it also can alter it.

This is not a new concept. After all, it was Hippocrates who said, "Food should be our medicine and medicine should be our food." In most traditional medicinal systems food plays an integral part of the healing process as is evidenced by the ancient Eastern philosophy of food energies and flavours.



When combined with other natural therapies or remedies, food selection is crucial to health and healing; yet choosing food patterns varies from person to person. The best way to determine appropriate food for you, in relation to your own body, physically, mentally and spiritually, is to discuss it with a holistic doctor. However there are some basic guidelines for selecting foods to attain and sustain optimum health and well-being. Whenever possible, choose foods that are:

- Whole, such as cooked or raw vegetables and fruits which supply all of nature's nutrients, providing us with the life energy of the food.
- Fresh, natural and organic, if possible, as opposed to canned, frozen or genetically modified.
- Seasonal to be in harmony with our environment. Fruits and vegetables in season are not only less expensive but do not lose nutrients.
- Local because it is picked riper and does not lose nutrients from being transported long distances.
- In harmony with tradition, paying attention to what our ancestors ate. For example, our staple grain may taste more appropriate and be more beneficial if our ancestors ate it as well — barley and oats from the British Isles, rye and wheat from Europe, kasha from Eastern Europe or Russia and millet and rice from Asia.
- Pay attention to the energies and flavours of food and how they affect us.

