

HEALTH

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TCM: Ginseng can help beat the heat

Summer's here – and so is excessive perspiration, insomnia, sunburn and heat rash. Here are some traditional Chinese medicine tips for keeping your body in good shape during the often exhausting humid season.

According to TCM, summer is synonymous with the fire element. Excess heat is seen as injurious to the heart, the organ that rules the mind, so becoming overheated makes us restless, fidgety and fatigued yet unable to sleep. Try to live life at a slower pace, keep calm, and go to bed at a reasonable hour – no later than 1am. Children and the elderly should take an afternoon nap.

At this time of year, air conditioners get a workout, resulting in moisture loss in the atmosphere. Overuse of air conditioning means that the body can't adjust to temperature fluctuations. This leads to

imbalances and discomforts such as headache, dry nose and throat, runny nose, coughs and skin problems.

To bridge the gap between inside and outside temperatures, experts advise maintaining room temperature at about 25 degrees Celsius. Put a glass of water in the room to ensure that there's moisture in the air, and avoid standing for long periods near vents or fans aimed directly at you.

Exercise at a moderate intensity and don't over-expose yourself to the Sun. It's better to exercise in the morning or evening. Intense workouts such as aerobics aren't suitable in the

morning because they overload the heart and lung functions and leave you tired for the rest of the day. If you perspire, wipe off the sweat before going into a cool room. Avoid cold drinks or baths after exercise because they disrupt your thermo-regulation and you could get a cold.

According to TCM, summer heat combines with dampness to inhibit the transformation and transportation functions of the spleen and stomach. This induces sweat, suppresses the appetite and thirst, makes limbs heavy, and even gives a burning sensation during urination or elimination.

Go for a light diet featuring lots of fresh vegetables and melon; eschew very cold, greasy or spicy food. Foods that help include wax gourd, balsam pear, cucumber, edible amaranth, bean sprouts, bean curd and celery. Serve soups made with beneficial ingredients such as wax gourd, lotus leaf, hyacinth bean and kudzu vine root.

To prevent dehydration, drink two litres of water daily – this is especially important for those who drink coffee and tea, both of which are diuretic. Fresh juices such as lotus root, pear, watermelon and water chestnut promote body fluid production.

Here's the recipe for a summer soup, using American ginseng (30g), dried lotus leaf (50g) and wax gourd (400g): Wash and chop the wax gourd into large pieces (don't remove the peel). Wash the lotus leaf and ginseng. Put the ingredients in a pot with 1.5 litres of water, bring to a boil and simmer for about an hour. Add salt to taste and serve warm.

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Before taking any medicine, please consult your TCM or medical practitioner