

HEALTH

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TCM

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Food taboos

Food taboos are an important part of Chinese culture. When someone suffers from a particular disorder or is taking medication, they often ask TCM practitioners what foods they should avoid.

The Chinese have a long history of dietary practice. There are records of court physicians dealing with dietary problems more than 2,500 years ago.

A balanced diet and moderate eating was promoted in *Yinshan Zhengyao (Important Principles of Food and Drink)*, written in 1330 by imperial chef Hu Sihui.

The book lists 230 cereals, meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, with a description of their nutritional benefits and taboos. Hu said that eating too many apples caused abdominal distension, and that too many oranges could harm the liver, but that grapes gave sustained energy.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, daily foods and beverages (whether they have hot or cold properties) should be chosen according to a person's constitution and condition.

Inappropriate food will lead to extreme energy excess inside the body and disturb its internal balance. Improper diets can lead to a so-called accumulation of evils and contribute to a disease relapse, skin sores or lack of energy.

Some taboos are familiar. For example, a low-salt diet is often

recommended for heart and body-fluid disorders. Low-fat foods are recommended for liver and digestive disorders, and coffee and tea are best avoided if you have insomnia.

Other taboos are unique to TCM. Pungent or hot foods such as mutton, wine, ginger, chives, garlic, peppers and chilli (above) generate heat energy inside the body and should be avoided in heat syndromes, whose symptoms include a flushed face, fever, irritability, constipation or insomnia.

Pears, persimmons, plums, crabs, clams, melons and vegetables can lead to a cold imbalance and should be avoided in cold syndromes, which show when people have a pale complexion, poor appetite, cold limbs, diarrhoea and fatigue.

Foods that arouse wind evils and activate *chi* (vital energy) such as fish, shrimp, crab, beef, bean sprouts, mustard and eggs should be avoided by people suffering from the common cold, or who are recovering from throat, eye or skin problems. Wind symptoms include sneezing, a runny nose and dizziness.

Damp-heat accumulation is associated with conditions such as obesity, urinary tract infections and enteritis. Avoid pork, wine, cheese, biscuits and cakes.

Before taking medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner