

HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

TCM: beat the autumnal blues

Autumn is here. The days are getting shorter and humidity and temperature levels will soon go down. In traditional Chinese medicine, autumn correlates with the lung system, which dominates the skin, respiration, body fluids, metabolism, blood circulation, immunity and emotions.

Since the vigorous summer is over, everything needs to turn inwards to prepare for the winter. A good lifestyle means that we remain in harmony with the environment, adapt better to seasonal changes and stay healthy.

Autumn is a time of maturity and decay, so we may start to feel a trifle gloomy. We should try to be optimistic as much as possible as pessimism can lead to physical illness. Autumn is a great time for outdoor activities such as hiking or climbing mountains: let the sun warm the body and rejuvenate the spirit. As it turns cooler, try to turn off the air conditioner and open the windows as fresh air and natural temperatures promote sounder sleep. It is not necessary to start wearing too many clothes as a gradual adaptation to the cold helps build up resistance.

Foods are important to ensure the

body adjusts to the changing seasons. The dry weather usually causes an itchy throat, a dry nose, chapped lips, rough skin, hair loss and dry stools. We need to eat to promote the production of body fluids and their lubricating effects throughout the body.

Beneficial foods for this are lily bulb, white fungus, nuts or seeds, pears, lotus roots, pumpkin, honey, soy milk and dairy products. Eat more food with sour flavours and reduce pungent ones: onions, ginger and peppers induce perspiration, while sour foods such as pineapple, apple, grapefruit and lemon have astringent properties that help prevent the loss of body fluids.

Some conditions such as asthma or allergic problems are made worse in autumn. Dwarf lily-turf tuber, lily bulb and fragrant solomonseal rhizome can nourish the lungs and smooth air passages. People who do shift work, smoke or drink regularly tend to overload their lungs and stomachs. This can lead to coughs, sore throat, thirst and hoarseness. American ginseng, Chinese yam, apricot kernel and furleaf ladybell root help overcome these conditions. Constipation may indicate

that the intestines are too dry, so they can be lubricated by eating fig, apricot kernel and arhat fruit. Itchy skin and hair loss may need relief by enhancing the blood with herbs like angelica root, white peony root and fleecflower root.

When the weather turns cold and dry, the risk of chest pain or joint pain increases; wolfberry, hawthorn fruit and plantain seed help clear the blood and stabilise its flow in the blood vessels.

In autumn, the body needs extra fluids to counteract the dry environment. It is a Chinese tradition at this time to eat porridge for breakfast and drink soup at dinner.

A sweet and delicious soup for the whole family includes chestnuts (200 grams), apples (2-3), water chestnuts (15 pieces), lily bulb (15 grams), lotus seed (15 grams), pig's spleen (2 pieces) and pork ribs (500 grams), add three litres of water, bring to a boil quickly and then simmer for two hours.

.....
Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings (icm.com.hk). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner.