

Seasonal Healing: SPRING

by Peeka Trenkle

As winter ends and we move into spring, our bodies begin to have different needs. In winter our challenges are to stay warm, to be able to digest heavier foods and to fend off the flu. For most healthy people, a little extra salt in the diet during the winter improves water retention, which is beneficial during dry, cold weather. Our need for extra salt, however, naturally falls away as the weather warms and the air becomes moist. In spring, as sap rises in the trees, our lymph begins to move more. We are now more capable of discharging wastes and unnecessary weight and we can begin a process of revitalization as the light increases and the weather becomes warmer. We can accelerate our healing by focusing on the energy of the season and its unique affinities with different organs and systems of the body. Spring is associated with the liver and lymphatic system.

TIPS FOR SPRING

This is the best time of year to begin an exercise program. Vigorous exercise will help the body to release stored toxins and stimulate the lymphatic circulatory system for stronger immunity.

Eat wild greens - learn to identify & gather what is growing near you. Make sure you are gathering from an area that is not treated with herbicides or pesticides. Look for dandelion, garlic mustard, wintercress, nettles and wild onion. Once you get a taste they will likely become a yearly treat.

Eat seasonal foods & warming foods to help the body gradually adjust to warmer weather.

Limit raw fruits and watery vegetables such as lettuce, celery, and cucumber, which are more suited to summer diets.

Limit fats, dairy, flour products, and sugar to help the liver decongest from heavier winter foods.

Dress in layers in the changeable weather so you don't get chilled.

The popular belief that we need to work hard to cleanse our bodies is not necessarily true - the body cleanses itself if it is given a chance. If we do not eat toxic or non-nourishing foods, our ability to heal and cleanse ourselves becomes spontaneous. Fasting is one way to facilitate cleansing in the spring but it is to be approached cautiously and with supervision. There are many other ways to stimulate cleansing and detoxifying (see sidebar).

Spring is traditionally thought of as a time of renewal and rebirth - it is also a time when we can become more susceptible to certain illness. Eruptive fevers such as chicken pox, measles and roseola are most common. Lymph-related illnesses such as tonsillitis and mumps also appear frequently. We often feel more fatigue and sluggishness as we adjust to the new season. The weather is changeable now so our pores are opening and closing as we attempt to synchronize our internal temperature with the ups and downs of the temperature outside. This creates a great demand on our energy and our immune system. If the pores are open on a warm sunny day and the weather turns suddenly cold, we are then more vulnerable to what Chinese medicine calls 'invasion of cold' - we are more likely to become sick. It is a good idea to stay warm in early spring by eating warming foods and dressing warmly.

With the coming of the new growing plants we should alter our diets to include more fresh greens, wild plants and fewer stored or preserved foods. Following the cycle of the year in our diet and lifestyle can keep us healthier and more deeply connected with our natural world.

Peeka Trenkle is an herbalist and homeopathic consultant with a private practice in NYC and Denville, NJ. She is a long time advocate for natural health and healing and has been in practice for over 25 years. She is on the faculty at the NY Open Center where for 10 years she taught Green Medicine: An eight-month training in Western Herbalism. She is a professional member of the American Herbalists Guild and is a graduate of The School of Homeopathy, NY.