

Seasons & Wellbeing

by Indira Mariappan



Welcome to Season's Health

The idea of the Seasons' info sheets is to improve our health and appreciation of how the seasons and the environment influence us. As part of this process, I would like to introduce a few self-help approaches that can support our health through the seasons.

Traditional medicine in India and China, for instance, considers that harmony with the seasons is second nature to the balanced person. It is through practices that bring us closer to the cycles of nature that we begin to hear the voice of our nature clearly and therefore begin to choose wisely for ourselves.

Ayurveda (India's traditional system of health and healing) teaches us that "diseases are generated at the junctions of the seasons", the moments when one season changes into another. Whenever our external or internal environment changes, our systems must change with it. Each time we adapt poorly, we expose ourselves to the possibility of dis-ease.

Similarly, the ancient Chinese believed that the seasons have a profound cyclical effect on human growth and wellbeing. The 5 Element system of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a wonderful foundation from which to explore seasonal health.

Each of the 5 elements—Earth, Metal, Water, Wood and Fire—has a corresponding season. Each element has specific attributes including foods, herbs, minerals, homeopathics and exercises (to name a few) that assist our attunement to the seasons.

Earth

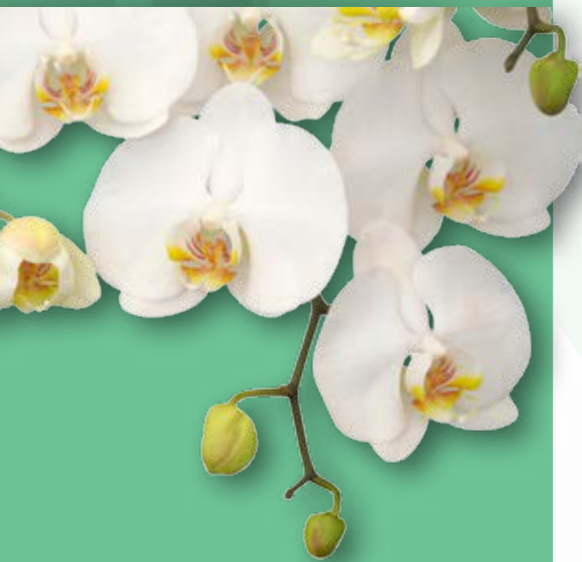
Mid February to March corresponds to the **Earth** element. During this late summer period there is a distinct shift, a brief pause between the expansive nature of spring and summer and the quiet inward nature of autumn and winter. In essence, it is the point of transition from yang to yin. The Earth element is also represented at the brief periods of change between the other seasons.

Late summer days are hot and high in humidity with a feeling of heaviness in the air. This often parallels the way our bodies feel during this period.

Dampness is associated with the earth element and ailments suffered during this season involve excessive fluids in the body. Characteristic symptoms include abdominal bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, intestinal spasms, diarrhoea, lethargy and sore, stiff or achy joints.

When the earth element is unbalanced, the central organ of **digestion** (in Chinese medicine—the **Spleen**) is affected.

In TCM, an organ represents a set of functions that are expressed in various ways. The functions of the Spleen are adaptation, nourishment and support at the physiological, mental and emotional levels.



The Spleen governs our ability to digest our food and our thoughts. It is interesting to observe how our powers of concentration and digestion are related. Overeating for instance, can make the mind sluggish; too much studying often makes us crave sweet foods; too much worrying can knot our digestive system.

At the emotional level the Spleen governs our ability to meet our needs, to obtain and give emotional nourishment and support. The internal mother and home is a great description of the role of the Spleen. Naturally when our needs are met we feel nourished, supported and secure. However we often confuse emotional and nutritional needs—eating when we need comfort or when we feel frustrated.

Tips to balance the earth element

Food preparation should be simple with a minimum of seasoning and a mild taste. Avoid complicated dishes and combinations of foods. This approach can be used at any time to help regain balance.

Include foods that are considered harmonising at this time of the year:

- ✘ **grains:** millet, rice, sweet rice, amaranth
- ✘ **beans:** soya beans, tofu, garbanzo beans
- ✘ **vegetables:** sweet potato, potato, corn, carrots, cabbage, squash, string beans
- ✘ **fruit:** apricots, rock melons (in moderation)
- ✘ **fish:** sardines, salmon, white fish
- ✘ **herbal teas:** peppermint, fresh ginger root, dried dandelion root.

Chew your food well and allow the chewing to relax you! Thorough chewing turns grains and complex carbohydrates into satisfying sugars and releases their nutrients. Chewing involves allowing our food to mix with saliva and become liquid before swallowing! The more whole carbohydrate foods are chewed, the

sweeter they become; and because digestion becomes so efficient, the body begins to feel wonderfully light.

This incidentally, is a great way to gradually reduce **sweet cravings!**

The sweet flavour in the form of complex carbohydrates energizes yet relaxes the body, nerves and brain. TCM teaches that this is the flavour especially harmonising at the time of the equinoxes and solstices as well as during late summer. So, chew to seek the sweetness in food and life!!

Enjoying good food in a relaxed manner with good company is fundamental to being fully nourished! Without this joy, the most wholesome delicious meal can seem tasteless and leave the soul hungry. Sometimes people eat only for the taste or according to a diet or nutritional value; this often develops into cravings and serves to bring disharmony into their lives.

Hydrate well and often between meals! Keep chilled and iced drinks to a minimum as this weakens digestive function.

Natural medicines can be helpful when one is adversely affected by the sultry and oppressive weather of late summer. I have found that the Blackmores celloid mineral sodium sulphate and the homeopathic gelsemium are frequently indicated in my practice.

Bach flowers such as white chestnut and cherry plum can help with unwanted thoughts and worries.

Exercises to connect us to the earth element include walking barefoot on the grass or on the beach daily. Tamara Graham, my yogic friend and teacher suggests the following simple exercise which involves a tennis ball! Stand upright and balanced on both feet. Breathe and relax, then lift one foot and roll the tennis ball against the ground. Roll the ball a dozen times along the whole length of the foot; then experience how that foot feels when returning to the balanced

standing position. Repeat on the other side. Again experience how this feels.

A bit about me!

I am a qualified pharmacist who has extended my knowledge of health and healing by studying nutrition, herbal medicine, homeopathy and naturopathy.

I have a great joy and enthusiasm for life which naturally extends to my work! I derive a great sense of satisfaction in supporting people in their health care, be it in my capacity as a pharmacist or as a naturopath.

Over the years, many of my pharmacy clients and patients in my naturopathic clinic have asked for measures to maintain and improve their health after their immediate health concerns have been met. The newsletters are a step to address this need.

I sincerely hope you have found the information in this first info sheet to be of interest and assistance. Your feedback will be much appreciated!

In good health and happiness,



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Consultations:
SeasonsHealth.com.au



“Most folks are as happy as they make up their mind to be.”

~ Abraham Lincoln