

Late Summer Season, Earth Element

Early August - Mid September

Background: Chinese Medicine and Daoist philosophy looks to nature to understand health and harmony. The ancients witnessed that all living things are dynamic and interdependent. The seasons progressing naturally into one another is the basis of the Five Element Theory. The five elements, or active phases, are Wood (Spring), Fire (Summer), Earth (Late Summer), Metal (Fall) and Water (Winter).

Late Summer is a time of abundance, fullness and plenty. Yin and Yang are in harmony. It is a time when nature slows down from rapid production and lies about in the warm fields, listening to the humming of bees. Fruits hang heavy and round on trees, dripping ripe with sweetness. While temperatures are still warm, the intensity of the sun softens as the angle of its rays decreases. In Chinese medicine the **Earth Phase** is at its height during this time. While all the other phases of the Five Elements are associated with a direction of movement, Earth acts as a fulcrum or center around which the other Elements move. Earth energy is the place of balance and centrality, like the hub of a wheel that connects everything together. Earth creates shape, form and holding, as well as provides nourishment and stability. Earth provides the container from which all of life can unfold and flourish. The Earth Phase can also be felt in the 2-3 week transition period between each season. The ease with which we are able to flow with the transitions from one season to the next offers us insight into the health and stability of the Earth Element inside us.

In the Late Summer, the qi of nature is full and abundant, neither rising (Fire) nor falling (Metal). In humans, this is a time of softening, digesting and assimilating. It is a time when we get to come home to ourselves, and absorb the fruit of our labors. In Chinese Medicine, the **Spleen Network** is associated with the Earth Element. Ruling digestion and transportation, the Spleen Network includes the spleen, pancreas, stomach, lymphatic system, muscles, fascia, mouth, and lips. The Spleen governs digestion and absorption by extracting and refining the essences from foods, builds up Blood and qi, directs ascending movements and holds things up, controls the flesh and holds things in place, keeps Blood in its vessels, opens into the mouth, manifests in the lips, governs the sense of taste, and governs the quality of thought. The Stomach controls the rotting and ripening of food, breaks down foods to allow the Spleen to extract food essences, and rules descending movements.

The goal of **Late Summer Self-Care** is to nourish the Spleen network through regular routines, stress-reduction practices, and home-care. Our emotional life is closely linked to our ability to digest food. When we feel emotionally upset or overly stressed, especially worried and over-thinking, this negatively impacts our digestive functions. Conversely, feelings of contentment and calm promote balanced hunger, heightened digestive ability, nutrient assimilation and enjoyment of eating. Therefore, in order to be in harmony with the Harvest Season, we need get back to the basics of eating, sleeping, exercise, and rest so that we can digest and reap the benefits of our food, emotions and life experiences to the fullest.

How to Live in Harmony with the Late Summer Season

Reflect: First, be conscious of the harvest of your life. Think about yourself, your relationships, and your work. What parts of your life are bearing fruit? Where is the harvest rich? Where do you find it stunted?_Second, consider what you need to do to make ready for the letting go of autumn. With your harvest in mind, ask: What is overgrown or unneeded? What distracts you from your dearest concerns? What can you simplify in yourself or your life?

Taste: Enjoy the abundance of the harvest by chewing well and tasting the special qualities of each food on your plate. Savor the crispness of the carrot, the coolness of the cucumber, the juiciness of the tomato, the sweetness of the peach. Notice the seeds: within each harvest lie the seeds of the next!

Home: Earth is about your home and comfort level. If you feel your Earth moving out of balance, try attending to matters around your home. House cleaning, home improvement projects, and spending more time in the kitchen cooking up tasty recipes will help bring your Inner Earth into balance.

Meditate: Take time each day to find and experience your belly-center. Visualize your connection to the earth, through your feet, legs, belly and base of your spine. Whenever your head or heart become over-active or start spinning, take a moment to sense and breathe into your personal center.

Rhythm/ Consistent Routines: Earth is about regularity, rhythm and balance. Keeping your schedule as consistent as possible, including eating and sleeping at regular times each day, helps your Inner Earth feel satisfied. The period between 7 and 9 a.m. is the time in which nature gives the Stomach an extra measure of energy, so this is the optimum time to take in nourishment. Eat a hearty, balanced breakfast to start your day with "fuel in the tank." It is also recommended to avoid eating anything a couple hours before sleeping to give time for digestion to take place.

Exercise: Daily walks and qigong practice is recommended. Cycling and swimming are also good.

Nutrition: Because Earth is the harvest season of Late Summer, there is usually a cornucopia of abundant produce available, especially at your local Farmers' Market. Eating lots of seasonal, locally grown organic produce will help your body and digestive system get more in tune with the rhythm of the season. **Earth-nourishing foods:** grains like brown rice, amaranth, quinoa, and buckwheat, legumes and lentils, squash like butternut, kabocha, spaghetti, acorn, and delicata, sweet potatoes, layered veggies like brussel sprouts, cabbage, artichokes and onions, small amounts of seasonal fruits like apples and pears, seeds like sesame, pumpkin, and sunflower, nuts like walnuts and pistachios, and small amounts of meat. Steaming vegetables or cooking foods for longer times at lower temperatures (roasting, baking) is recommended. The digestive system loves to be warm. Too many cold foods such as dairy, ice cold beverages, and raw foods can upset the stomach. A simple way to support your digestion is to drink and eat foods at room temperature or warmer. It is also helpful to cook with warming spices such as: black pepper, cinnamon, caraway, clove, turmeric, sage, cayenne, and nutmeg.

Caring for Others: In this season when nature gives her bounty, we can also rejoice in giving. You need not wait until you can give a "great gift." A word, a courtesy, a thoughtfulness - given today - is a great gift.

Sources

Wood Becomes Water: Chinese Medicine in Everyday Life by Gail Reichstein

The Way of the Five Seasons by John Kirkwood