

Spring Season, Wood Element

February 4th - May 5th 2018; Rising Yang

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) & Water (Winter).

Spring teaches us about birth, arousal, and movement as the dormant forces underground are called to life again. The increase in daylight quickens movement both in nature and in us. Animals come out of hibernation, birds court and build nests, ice melts, rivers rush, seeds sprout, trees grows upward and outward.

For people, qi slowly rises from its winter storage in the lower abdomen and bones and moves into the torso where it stimulates the **Liver Network** with fresh vitality. The Liver Network includes the liver, gall bladder, muscles, tendons, fascia, and eyes. The rising qi of spring carries both benefits and potential for problems. As it moves into the blood-rich liver organ, it often meets stagnant blood and metabolic waste leftover from winter's inactivity which can produce an obstruction to the qi flow. So, while spring energy can give us a sense of renewal and inspiration, it can also bring feelings of irritability, anxiety, and even depression. These anxious feelings are common-- just as a tree awakens from winter's dormancy by filling with fresh sap, so do we feel a pressure gradually building within us. It is this pressure-from-within that can provoke impatience, frustration and even anger during this season.

The goal of spring self-care is to facilitate a smooth awakening of qi flow. The ancient text **The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine** states: *The three months of spring are a period of revitalization in nature in which things begin to grow and display. Heaven begins to generate warm energy and Earth begins to develop, so that everything flourishes. It is desirable to retire and rise early, take a walk in the yard, loosen up the hair and relax the body. Since this is the season in which the universal energy begins anew and rejuvenates, one should attempt to correspond to it by opening both physically and emotionally-- praising instead of punishing, cultivating instead of destroying.* To harmonize with this season, we are encouraged to move our bodies gently, relax our rigid beliefs, and tenderly open outwards to the environment and others around us.

In the Five Element Theory, spring is associated with the **Wood Phase**, moving upward and outward. Encompassing all forms of plant-life, Wood teaches us to balance strength with flexibility. We draw from our watery roots to move forward with strength and firmness of purpose, while also remaining supple and yielding.

Healthy Tips for Spring Self-Care

Sense: Do you have an inner sense of something bubbling upwards in your body? Is your focus turning from the inward-looking *yin* qualities of winter to the outward-looking *yang* qualities of spring? By paying close attention to our internal landscape, we can notice when spring has sprung!

Observe: See nature bursting with color and vitality. Watch buds transform to leaves. Look for birds' nests and bees gathering nectar. Notice the changes going on around you, and invite change in.

Move: The Liver needs movement and so do we. Take walks in nature. Practice qigong or yoga exercises that open the chest and stretch the tendons & muscles. Especially in the early months of

spring, do not overexert yourself. Move with playfulness and curiosity-- this renews our being and extends our life.

Sort: In mid to late spring, it is appropriate to increase activity. Create the space in your physical environment needed to allow for new growth to materialize. Sort and Organize- Go through your home and office in order to recycle things you don't need; Weed- Clear out overgrowth in the garden.

Envision: Imagine what you would like to materialize and plan ways to actualize these visions.

Try Something New: In this season when nature renews itself, we can do the same. Begin something new-- at home, in school, at work or within yourself. Be creative and begin!

Meditate: The condition of being completely relaxed allows the Liver to perform its myriad tasks with unencumbered power. Meditation helps to calm the nervous system which calms the Liver. Take time to "sip from your well" for replenishment during this time of increasing external activity.

Conduct of Spring: In spring, we uphold the regeneration of life by being charitable and gentle. Traditionally in China, debts would be forgiven. Today we can practice giving others the benefit of the doubt and being generous. With others, we can cultivate modesty, gentleness, and openness. Internally, we can soften our inner voice, letting go of the need to be something other than ourselves.

Nutrition: Spring is the time for a lighter, healthier diet and for detoxing so the Liver can do its job more effectively. Begin by eliminating foods that stress the Liver, such as fried & fatty foods and too much meat & dairy. It is also important to eliminate sugar, white flour, and foods with chemical preservatives and food coloring. Eliminate or reduce alcohol and caffeine. Enjoy the abundance of **fresh foods** that are coming to market. Try to eat slowly, savoring the flavors. **Nourishing foods for the season include:** Sprouts, greens such as romaine, kale, chard, collards, bok choy and dandelion, asparagus, celery, citrus fruits, sauerkraut, sprouted grains and seeds, chicken, turkey, basil, fennel, marjoram, rosemary, dill, parsley. **Cook food for shorter times at higher temperatures** (sauteing and steaming) and include a few raw foods as well.

Spring Herbs:

Nettles – blood purifier, high in chlorophyll, iron, vitamin C, trace minerals, diuretic, tonic, skin cleanser, liver tonic, good for allergies / **Dandelion Leaf & Root**- leaves are high in vitamin A; roots are a kidney, liver and blood cleanser, tonic, diuretic; Great for congested liver / **Sassafras Bark**- blood purifier, skin & joint cleanser **Burdock** – bitter, diuretic, skin & blood purifier, great for liver and skin conditions / **Yellow Dock** –blood cleanser, promotes bile flow, stimulates bowel & liver / **Peppermint tea**, especially if you're sighing frequently or experiencing irritability, will help to soothe Liver Qi.

Hydrate: Water helps to flush out our bodies, so sip frequently. Upon awakening, before that first cup of tea or coffee, drink **warm water with lemon** to detoxify the liver and gallbladder. Or try 1 teaspoon each of **apple cider vinegar** and raw honey in one cup of warm water.

Sources

Wood Becomes Water: Chinese Medicine in Everyday Life by Gail Reichstein
Qigong Through the Seasons by Ronald H. Davis
The Way of the Five Elements by John Kirkwood
The Way of the Three Treasures by Liu Ming
Staying Healthy With the Seasons by Elson M. Haas