



WINTER

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, each season is associated with one of the Five Elements (Fire, Earth, Metal, Wood, Water). Winter is the season connected with the Water element and rules the kidneys. Kidney energy is our most basic and fundamental energy. It controls the immune system, bones, bone marrow, brain, body fluids and reproduction. Our longevity is greatly determined by how well we balance this energy. The kidneys store all the reserve Qi (energy) in the body so that it can be used in stressful times, to help heal and to prevent illness. During the winter months it is important to nurture and nourish our kidney Qi.

Dehydration, too much salt and excessive behaviors burden kidney energy. Especially at this time of year, we should be drinking more warm liquids, reducing salt intake and balancing the quantities and types of food we eat. The perfect foods for this season that nourish kidney energy are: black beans, black mushrooms, black sesame seeds, blackberries, black tea, walnuts seeds, asparagus and some seaweeds. Try to reduce the intake of heavy meats, sugars, sodium and excessively cooling foods. Give your body a balance of what it really needs - warming, grounding, nourishing foods.

Keeping kidney energy in balance goes beyond the physical plane; we must balance our emotions as well. Fear is the negative emotion associated with the kidneys. A body holding too much fear can weaken the organs just as much as, if not more than, improper nutrition. In a healthy way, fear helps us to remain alert when confronted with danger. It fills us with the courage to face the situation. When out of balance though, fear can become an obstacle that impedes us. Excessive and/or habitual fear is detrimental to the kidneys. We can use this introspective time of year to consider and address our fears and devise a course of action to help minimize and release them.

The cooler and shorter days now are conducive to spending more time in meditation and reflection. Winter is the perfect time to do some internal work – meditation, Qigong, reading, writing. These practices help us connect with our inner self and support our kidney health. Meditation practices which help to calm the mind and heart are extremely beneficial. Qigong has great value during the winter as it helps to relieve stagnant energy caused by less activity and the cold weather. Qigong will also enhance the flow of vital Qi throughout the body.

In winter, try to balance stress levels and make sure you are getting enough sleep - take advantage of the shorter days and go to bed a little earlier. Rest is important to revitalizing the kidneys – consider how some animals hibernate in the winter. During winter, open your curtains

during the day to allow any sunlight to come in and take brisk walks, in the sunshine if possible. The walks will help to improve circulation and blood flow and the sunshine will give you a warming boost on a cold winter's day.

Element	Water
Season	Winter
Yin Organ	Kidneys
Color	Black/Dark Blue
Positive Emotion	Courage
Negative Emotion	Fear
Direction	North
Sense	Ears
Flavor	Salty