

BY COLLEEN CACKOWSKI

# THE HEALING POWER OF TONIC HERBS

*2400 years ago Hippocrates stated, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."*

**B**efore the age of cell phones and technology, it was well known that food was not only meant for sustenance, but also to prevent disease. Unfortunately, in today's society, we have all but lost our connection with the earth and with the healing power of natural substances.

As some things in the environment around us seem to get worse, simultaneously, things are also getting better! The infinite intelligence of the universe actually gives us everything we need for balance and optimal health... we just need to listen and act.

Hippocrates, ancient Chinese herbalists, discovered a system of herbal medicine that stands today as a major pillar of health and longevity. Now, more than ever before, we have access to amazing resources from almost anywhere in the world which can help maximize our well-being.

The system of Traditional Chinese Medicine has fully studied and classified over 8,000 herbs.

Most of these herbs are considered medicinal, but there is a small, yet important, category of herbs within this system which are more like food. This subset of herbs is known as the "Superior Herbs" or "Tonic Herbs". This group of superior herbs are called such because they support superior health. They are safe for anyone to use and can be taken on a regular basis long-term.

This is different from how you would use medicinal herbs, which are meant to be taken only for a period of time while you are addressing particular conditions.

Tonic herbs are adaptogens. They control the maintenance of life. They help balance the body's internal systems. This especially includes the immune system, hormones, blood, and more. Tonic herbs balance the energetics of the body. These herbs are not used to treat specific diseases or disorders per se, yet many medical conditions are often completely cured by regular use of these Superior Tonic Herbs.



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Often times we might go to a doctor because we are not feeling optimally. When we talk to the doctor, he or she might take a blood test or some other tests, check your body's functions, and then tell you that you are perfectly healthy. Still, you know that you are not feeling your best. There seems to be no medical explana-



tion for this, but Chinese medicine will have an explanation. It will be something like there's too much yang energy, too little yin energy, liver is out of balance...

When you address the body from the perspective of energetics, you can address conditions before they get out of hand. If something happens to your body that manifests in a disease, it's already been going on in your body as an energetic dynamic for many years. **Change the energetic, and you change the end result. This is easily done with tonic herbs.**

So what makes a superior tonic herb different from other healing herbs, and what actually do these tonic herbs address? Basically, they must impact at least one (but usually all, to some degree) of "The Three Treasures".

The foundation of Traditional Chinese Medicine states that there are Three Treasures that constitute life. These are known as *Jing*, *Chi* and *Shen*. These Three Treasures translate as Essence (*Jing*), Vitality (*Chi*) and Spirit (*Shen*).

It's difficult to explain exactly what the Chinese meant by these terms, but here is a brief description of each:

## *Jing*

This is the very essence that defines who and what we are, and also who and what we will produce for our entire life. *Jing* is the concentrated, regenerative energy that we receive from our parents at conception. It is the foundation of our existence—the root energy of the body that is responsible for physical energy, sexual energy, creativity, procreation, and longevity. This primal energy is easily dissipated through excessive behaviors including overeating, overdrinking, too much sexual activity, overwork, stress, lack of sleep, and other addictive behaviors.

*Jing* is like our backup battery system. This energy is stored in the kidneys. We pull from our *Jing* when our body requires more energy or

strength than what we need on a usual basis to perform our daily activities. *Jing* determines how long and how vitally you will live, and how much will and drive you have. For women it determines when they will go into menopause.

If we learn how to manage our *Jing*, we don't leak it unnecessarily. To preserve *Jing*, the Taoists recommended avoiding extremes and sought to maintain balance throughout their life. And here's the amazing gift of these Chinese tonic herbs: If someone has already burned a lot of their original *Jing*, there are actually tonic herbs that can be used to build back this precious energy.

Rebuilding *Jing* becomes very important in a world where everyday stressors tend to wear down our body's ability to adapt to circumstances. When you build your *Jing* back from the inside out, your body will no longer exist in a continuous state of flight-or-fight. Fear will subside. It's an incredible blessing to learn about how we can achieve this because when we run out of *Jing*, we run out of life.

## *Chi (or Qi)*

*Chi* is the second Treasure. It is the daily energy we get from the air we breathe and the food we eat. Our levels of *Chi* are therefore affected by the quality of our breathing, our food, and our environment. As long as we take care of ourselves, the *Chi* will circulate through all 12 meridians or energy pathways of the body and nourish all our vital organs.

*Chi* is our day-to-day vitality, and is related to the metabolic activities of the body. If you have ever eaten too much junk food, over time you notice that you don't have as much energy as when



you eat fresh, healthy, vital food. If you spend a lot of time in unhealthy environments, such as enclosed buildings with fluorescent lights and air conditioning, or if you live in a polluted environment, or have poor breathing habits, this can also weaken your *Chi*. Spending time in nature, such as in the forest or by the ocean will immediately make you feel better!

If your digestion isn't as strong as it could be, you can be sure this is related to your *Chi*. When your digestive fire is low, energy decreases. There are specific herbs that are strongly connected to building and maintaining *Chi*, and therefore supporting your daily energy levels.

In Chinese Medicine, one of the causes of ill health is the stagnation or blockage of *Chi* energy. When your *Chi* is strong, balanced, flowing and focused you will exude vitality and good health.

## *Shen*

The third Treasure, *Shen*, is a combination of mind and spirit. It gives us our conscience and our will. The quality of our *Shen* depends on

having healthy Jing and free flowing Chi which guides us to make good decisions in life, and impacts our contribution to the world.

Shen is the connection to our higher self and the Divine. It is housed in the Heart and provides us with feelings of peace and serenity. Shen gives us proper perspective on our life and our place in the universe. When the Spirit (Shen) is strong, we become more compassionate and caring for others and our attachment to the material dissipates.

If we are experiencing certain “negative” conditions such as depression, anxiety, stress or fear, these things are referred to as Shen disturbances. Certain herbs which are classified as Shen tonics can help dissipate the energy of a Shen disturbance and act as stabilizing agent that calms and grounds your energy during times of stress.

The benefits of taking a Shen tonic are not limited to the physical realm. Taking Shen tonics regularly may help you gain insight into your life and be able to see things from a higher perspective. You become more neutral so that you can stand back from yourself and see larger patterns of behavior. Once you have a more detached perspective, it’s easier to make different choices, and you don’t have to habitually respond in the same way to situations that you have in the past. It helps you get “unstuck”.

In a way, building Shen is the ultimate goal of a spiritual life, so that we may increase the light in the world and make our highest contribution on a soul level. Shen tonics help us to evolve spiritually to fulfill our highest callings.

Everyone is different in their energetic balance

of yin/yang and the “Three Treasures”: Jing, Chi and Shen. The great thing is that the tonic herbs have intelligence and work with each individual according to their own body and particular needs, balancing, stabilizing and harmonizing our energy on a personal level.

So how can you incorporate tonic herbs into a daily routine? Herbs come in many formats: capsules, loose powder, and tinctures are common forms. The latest growing trend originating in Los Angeles, California is adding tonic herbs to herbal elixirs. Tonic Bars, which are like next-level juice and smoothie bars, are popping up all over town.

Where we used to make a smoothie out of water, fruit and greens, now that technology is advancing to an entirely new level. Adding adaptogenic superior herbs to a smoothie or elixir makes a beverage that is fit for a king. A tonic elixir not only can add some degree of nutrition, more importantly it takes your body’s energy and balances it, increasing feelings of well-being, building immunity and often expanding “normal” states of consciousness.

**Out of the 8,000 herbs in the Chinese system, only about 100 of them are considered Superior Tonic Herbs.** You could probably write an entire book on each one of these, but all that’s

really important to know is that if you use them on a regular basis, your life will definitely improve!

It’s simple to add tonic herbs to any beverage. A common way of doing this is to heat some good quality water. You can just use the warm water straight, or make a base herbal tea with something like gynostemma (which is also a great

adaptogenic herb and highly recommended to drink daily). Take one or two cups of the base tea and add ¼-½ teaspoon of whatever tonic herb or combination of herbs you would like to try.

Optional add-ons which enhance the drink include coconut oil and a sweetener of choice. Using a hot liquid as a base is helpful in assimilating the herbs, but it is not required. You can also add these herbs to smoothies. Coconut oil acts as a creamer and a carrier which

helps the constituents of the herb enter through the cell membrane. It also helps moderate the rate at which the herbs enter the bloodstream. Sometimes the herbs taste a little bitter, so adding a sweetener like stevia or honey can make the elixir taste truly amazing!

On the next page are some fun recipes to try which include tonic herbs. If you’re a coffee drinker, they are often used as replacements to help people let go of a coffee addiction!

The easiest way to make these is if you have a blender and loose powdered herbs. But don’t let the lack of those things stop you from trying a tonic elixir!

You can start as simply as putting a few ingredients in a glass jar with some hot water and shake it up! If you only have capsules, if your base tea is hot, you can just drop the whole capsule in a blender and in the course of blending, the capsule shell will dissolve into the liquid. Alternatively, just open the capsule and empty the herbal contents into whatever kind of machine you are using to mix the formula.

These recipes use conservative measurements for people who are just starting out with tonic herbs, so over time, if you feel like you want to increase the dosage to larger amounts, such as ½-1 teaspoon per herb, that will work great for some people.



*Note: Some of my favorite web sites for ordering top quality tonic herbs are [www.JingHerbs.com](http://www.JingHerbs.com) and [www.DragonHerbs.com](http://www.DragonHerbs.com). If you are ordering internationally, please check with the supplier since countries vary with regard to their customs regulations.*

*Most of all, just enjoy the experience of incorporating tonic herbs into your daily routine – I promise it will change your life!*

## **Reishi Cappuccino**

- 12 oz. hot Gynostemma tea
- ½ TBS Dandy Blend or any coffee substitute powder
- Splash of almond milk
- 1 TBS Coconut oil
- 1 TBS Cacao powder
- ¼ teaspoon Reishi powder (or more depending on strength of Reishi you are using)
- ¼ teaspoon He Shou Wu powder (or more, according to taste)
- 1-2 droppers liquid Vanilla stevia and/or Xylitol powder to sweeten

## **Immunity Tonic**

- 12 oz. hot Gynostemma tea or other herbal tea base
- 1 TBS Coconut oil or Ghee
- ½ tsp Chaga Mushroom powder
- ¼ tsp Reishi Mushroom powder
- ¼ tsp Agaricus Mushroom powder
- Vanilla stevia or honey to taste

## **Energy Tonic**

- 12 oz. hot Gynostemma tea or other herbal tea base
- 1 TBS Coconut oil
- 1-2 droppers liquid Ginseng extract
- ½-1 tsp Astragalus
- ¼ tsp Cordyceps
- English Toffee stevia or honey to taste

*Editor's Note: Living Foods Magazine does not promote cacao powder as an optimal health food because it contains caffeine. However, we recognize that for some people raw cacao powder and coffee substitutes might be transitioning foods. Some of our expert authors include these ingredients to help people leave behind conventional chocolate and coffee addictions.*

