

Nurturing body and mind this summer solstice

Join naturopath, kinesiologist and therapeutic coach **LAURA SHIPP** to discover how the principles of Chinese medicine and Ayurveda can help guide us to a healthy body and mind during midsummer



Walking barefoot on grass reconnects us with the stabilising energy of the earth



NURTURING BALANCE AT THE HEIGHT OF THE YEAR

There is a unique quality to a Somerset summer. The hedgerows are lush and buzzing with bees, long green fields stretch beneath blue skies, and the light lingers into late evening. At the summer solstice, the year reaches its peak.

The summer solstice represents maximum light and vitality. It celebrates fertility, abundance and outward expression. Historically it's always been a time of gathering herbs, celebrating the sun and acknowledging the turning of the agricultural cycle.

Known as Litha in the Wheel of the Year, the summer solstice invites us to celebrate, whether it's gathering with friends to drink local cider, watching the sunset from Glastonbury Tor, or wild swimming at a scenic spot. Litha also invites us to remain conscious of our energy.

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurveda describe health through the

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‘Five Elements’, which represent patterns of energy found in nature and the body. In TCM the elements are wood, fire, earth, metal and water, each corresponding with organs, emotions, seasons and physiological functions. When these elements remain balanced, energy flows smoothly and health is supported. In Ayurveda, the elements are ether, air, fire, water and earth. These combine to form three constitutional energies – vata, pitta and kapha dosha. Vata (air and ether) governs movement and our nervous system. Pitta (fire with a little water) governs digestion, metabolism and clarity. Kapha (earth and water) provides stability, structure and nourishment.

BALANCING SUMMER ENERGY AND OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Summer can subtly strain our nervous system. Longer daylight affects melatonin production. Our social diary expands. Travel and disrupted routines increase. Sleep patterns shift.

The sympathetic nervous system – our ‘doing’ mode – can become dominant if we are not mindful. We may feel energised on the surface yet wired underneath. This state can be mistaken for vitality instead of hyperactivity. True vitality feels steady and grounded. It includes the capacity to rest deeply, to digest well and to wake refreshed. It includes emotional balance.

Protecting sleep becomes especially important during the long, light evenings, even when it feels tempting to stay up. Gentle, cooling environments help soothe excess heat, so spending time near water can calm both body and mind. Walking barefoot on grass reconnects us with the stabilising energy of the earth, while choosing early morning or later evening for activity avoids the intensity of peak midday heat. Building small pauses between commitments, rather than stacking plans, allows our nervous system to rest.

Many of us unconsciously link busyness with value, and summer can amplify that

tendency. We do not need to attend every event or make use of every hour of sunshine to justify the season. Presence nourishes more deeply than productivity ever can.

HEART-CENTRED WELL-BEING

In TCM, the heart is the emperor. When the heart is calm, our entire kingdom functions smoothly. Emotional balance, clear communication and genuine joy arise from a regulated heart system.

Summer offers an opportunity to nurture heart-centred living. This may mean meaningful conversation rather than endless scrolling. It may mean laughter shared around a fire rather than stimulation from constant noise.

Supporting our heart energetically can be as simple as slowing down enough to truly experience a moment. The smell of elderflowers. The warmth of sun on our skin. When awareness deepens, our nervous system softens.



THE FIRE ELEMENT IN TRADITIONAL WISDOM

Both Ayurveda and TCM wisdoms recognise that the height of summer carries a strong fire quality.

In TCM the fire element relates to the heart and small intestine and is associated with warmth, joy, communication and connection. It represents the peak of expansion in the yearly cycle. When fire is balanced, we feel calm, joyful, socially connected and mentally clear, with restful sleep and a settled mind.

When fire becomes excessive, the nervous system may become overstimulated. Signs can include poor sleep, irritability, palpitations, anxiety or a racing mind. The aim is not to extinguish fire but to keep it steady so warmth does not turn into agitation.

Ayurveda expresses a similar idea through pitta. Healthy pitta brings focus, courage, decisiveness and strong digestion. When excessive, it may show as irritability, inflammation, skin flare-ups, acid reflux, disturbed sleep or a relentless drive.

Both systems encourage balancing this seasonal fire by introducing cooling and calming influences, such as slowing our pace slightly, spending time in nature, eating lighter foods, maintaining regular sleep and allowing space for rest and reflection.

Expansion needs to be balanced with restoration so that summer energy nourishes rather than depletes us.

MANAGING EXCESS HEAT AND INFLAMMATION

Heat can show up physically as inflammatory symptoms, such as headaches, digestive discomfort, skin irritation or general irritability.

Fresh local produce, cooling fruits, hydration and avoiding spicy or alcohol-heavy patterns support balance. Somerset's abundant strawberries, cucumbers, leafy



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greens and fresh herbs are nature's remedy. Hydration becomes especially important. Dehydration alone can heighten fatigue, anxiety and sleep disturbance. Sipping water regularly rather than waiting for thirst is a small powerful act of self-care.

The key principle is moderation. Extremes whether dietary, social or emotional, tend to amplify the energy of the fire element.

HARNESSING SUMMER ENERGY WITHOUT BURNOUT

Perhaps the greatest teaching of the summer solstice is that this expansion is natural, but it is not infinite. Nature does not perform, it expresses.

When we align with seasonal rhythms, we give ourselves permission to experience summer fully, without exhausting ourselves in the process. We recognise that after fullness

comes integration. After action comes rest. Consider asking:

- Where am I overextending?
- Where can I introduce a little more spaciousness?
- What genuinely nourishes my joy?

Small shifts create profound results. An evening walk, a quiet cup of tea before the day begins, or a conscious breath before responding to an email. These practices may appear simple, yet they stabilise the fire within.

The height of the year is not a race to be won. It is a moment to be experienced. ●

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