

Eating Healthy To Lose Weight

Better health often starts with proper nutrition. There are many schemes and fads, often promoted by those who have a financial stake in what people eat. The standby answer of most physicians is eat less and exercise. Good advice that is often too general to get people to really eat better. The result of all this confusion, is often weight gain, and the resulting poor health. TCM provides a simplified way of looking at the relationship between food and our bodies that can help people understand what it means to eat healthy.

It is important to understand that TCM views most (not all) cases of obesity as a condition of malnourishment. It is seen as a situation where the body is not extracting enough, or the right kinds of material and energy from food. It is an imbalance or damage to the functioning of the digestive process. This results in the body trying to function on less than optimal energy from food. When the body does not get what it needs, cravings for more food develop. The result is overeating of rich, overly nourishing foods that can make a person feel damp and heavy. When a person feels damp and heavy, exercise becomes less rewarding, and activity decreases. As a person craves more food and does less, weight increases in a vicious cycle. Many people try to correct this problem with "diet" foods that are hard to digest and only deny the cravings that are driven by real nutritional needs. Often "diets" include raw vegetables, cold and iced foods, low calorie reduced fat and highly processed foods. These foods do not satisfy or help the digestive process to function properly. This type of eating only strains the digestive process, increasing cravings and perpetuating the cycle.

The best way to break this cycle is to eat a variety of fresh foods in moderation, combined and prepared in ways to help the digestive system function. The first step is to limit rich foods like dairy, meats, and highly processed foods in favor of fresh fruits and vegetables and simple cooked grains. It is important to "warm" the digestion through the use of cooked foods, soups, hot tea and spices. It is also important to avoid raw foods, cold foods and iced drinks, which are difficult to digest and decrease the efficiency of digestion. This type of eating style can make a person feel lighter and start the process of breaking the weight gain cycle. This is not a quick or easy process, but it is a way of working with your body rather than against it to improve health.

Herbs can also be helpful. Herbs are essentially extreme foods. Under the care of a certified Herbalist, Chinese herbs are formulated together in very specific ways, based on the individual. When added to

a healthy diet and exercise, herbs help correct the imbalance that is at the center of the weight gain. Once the digestive system starts working more efficiently, cravings decrease, energy increases, and exercise becomes more rewarding. It is up to the individual to use that fresh start, to build a cycle of good eating and exercise to permanently improve health.

Rules of thumb for proper eating

- Eat in moderation, find an exercise you enjoy.
- Eat the freshest best quality food available, avoid processed food
- Soups and soup-like foods are easy on the digestion.
- Focus on simple grains (rice, oatmeal, whole grain bread) beans/legumes, vegetables and fruits. Make meats and dairy, fats and sugars a minor part of the meal.
- Keep raw vegetables, cold foods, and iced beverages to a minimum. *Cooked food digests better*
- Eat foods that are in season when ever possible.
- Keep desserts, "fast foods", overly rich or sweet foods and "fake" low calorie foods to a minimum.
- Eat at least 3 meals a day, making sure that there is a mix of proteins and carbohydrates at every meal, especially breakfast.
- Hot tea after a meal will help digestion (*green tea preferred*)
- Use appropriate spices. *It helps the body digest food.*
- Listen to your cravings. *Cravings tell us that we didn't have enough of the right type of food at the last meal. Learn from the cravings and do better next time. Do not deny cravings, which will only make them worse. Satisfy a craving with the best quality of food available. Sweet cravings between meals means you didn't have enough energy from the last meal to do what you did and you need more at the previous meal. Sweet cravings or sleepiness, just after a meal means the body doesn't have the energy to digest food. (Eat before you are hungry or eat a lighter meal)*
- Control portions. *"Would you eat six oranges at a time, the equivalent of a tall glass of orange juice?" (You can have too much of a good thing). Peeling fresh fruit, or shelling nuts, or otherwise preparing foods helps to control portions and provide fresher food. In restaurants split the entree with a friend, or ask for half an entree.*
- Avoid worry and over thinking which stresses the digestion. *In other words don't count calories or watch the scale. Use how you feel as a measure of how well you are doing.*

Hartland Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine

Ancient wisdom for our modern age



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