

Staying Healthy This Winter

The ancient Chinese believed that human beings should live in harmony with the natural cycles of their environment. The cold and darkness of winter urges us to slow down. This is the time of year to reflect on our health, replenish our energy, and conserve our strength.

Winter is Yin in nature; it is inactive, cold, and damp. Remain introspective, restful, and consolidate your Qi through the season and prepare for the outburst of new life and energy in the spring.

- **Element: Water**
- **Nature: Yin**
- **Organs: Kidney, Urinary Bladder, Adrenal Glands, Ears, and Hair**
- **Taste: Salty**
- **Emotion: Fear and Depression**

Foods for Winter

Winter is a time when many people tend to reduce their activity. If that's true for you, it's wise to reduce the amount of food you eat, too, to avoid gaining weight unnecessarily. Avoid raw foods during the winter as much as possible, as these tend to cool the body. During winter you should emphasize warming foods:

Soups and stews
Root vegetables
Beans
Miso and seaweed
Garlic and ginger

Here are a few tips to staying healthy this winter:

Wash your hands regularly. Studies have shown that one of the main reasons that we catch colds and flu in the winter season is that we are indoors and in closer proximity to others in cold weather. Protect yourself by washing your hands regularly and try not to touch your face.

Get plenty of sleep. The Nei Ching, an ancient Chinese classic, advised people to go to sleep early and rise late, after the sun's rays have warmed the atmosphere a bit. This preserves your own yang Qi for the task of warming in the face of cold.

Reduce stress. Find a way to relax and release stress on a daily basis. Such methods may include yoga, meditation, biofeedback, simple relaxation therapy, or whatever method you use to release the stress and pressures of modern life.

Build Up Your Protective Qi.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can prevent colds and flu by building up the immune system with just a few needles inserted into key points along the body's energy pathways.

These points are known for strengthening the circulation of blood and energy and for consolidating the outer defense layers of the skin and muscle (wei Qi) so that germs and viruses cannot enter through them.

Seasonal acupuncture treatments just four times a year also serve to tonify the inner organ systems and can correct minor annoyances before they become serious problems. The ultra-thin needles don't hurt and are inserted just under the skin. The practitioner may twist or "stimulate" them once or twice, and they are removed within 10 to 20 minutes.