


Time for LETTING GO

Discover how to cleanse and recharge your system for the season ahead using Traditional Chinese Medicine.

AS SUMMER GIVES way to autumn, the air feels rich with promise and abundant with nature's bounty – crops are harvested and stored, fields are bathed in morning mists and everything has a golden glow. Our thoughts turn to nourishing ourselves with hearty meals and staying cosy as our bodies fall in rhythm with the natural world. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) encourages us to see autumn as a time to slow down, gently bid the warmer months goodbye and renew ourselves for the new, cooler season.

Originating more than 2,000 years ago, TCM is a holistic approach to wellbeing based on mind and body treatments, incorporating nutrition, herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage and gentle movement. It provides ways for you to create equilibrium within your body, leading to better health 

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and moods. This equilibrium is perhaps best portrayed by the well-known Chinese yin-yang symbol – the black and white circle denoting balance between two distinct qualities, which together make up the whole. And this balance epitomises autumn – we reap the fruits of our efforts from the year so far, being nourished by what is good and clearing out whatever no longer serves us in order to restore equilibrium.

'Just like the harvest, autumn is associated with letting go of the old, leaving us more receptive to the new and not dwelling in the past,' says Stephanie Curle, a member of The Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture UK (ATCM), the regulatory body for TCM. 'It's a time for cleansing and returning to your roots. If you look at it from a nature aspect, leaves are falling softly, trees are stripped bare and nutrients are absorbed back into the roots and into the ground, ready for new growth in the future. It's similar with your body. This process helps you recharge inner energy and focus on yourself.'

THE MAGIC OF MERIDIANS

In TCM, qi (also known as chi), which translates as 'life force', is a vital energy that flows through your body. It does this via channels known as meridians, which are linked to organs and specific functions. The key meridians associated with autumn are your large intestine and lungs, with their ability to absorb nutrients and remove waste from your body. Simply put, they have a significant impact on what your body holds on to and, crucially, what it lets go of.

'The large intestine's job is to receive digested food from the small intestine, process it, and then of course eliminate anything that's toxic or unnecessary,' says Stephanie. 'Because of the vital downward



A good flow of qi gives you a lift, so you feel revitalised

direction involved, TCM focuses on foods that are believed to promote that downward movement, such as apples, bananas, barley, aubergines, grapefruits and wheat.'

Also associated with autumn is the lung meridian, which is greatly associated with qi. Your lungs are considered to diffuse qi and send it flowing throughout your entire body – including to the cells in your skin. This is why lungs, and the appearance of your hair and skin, are seen as connected in TCM. When you breathe in, your body is replenished by clean air, which the lungs transform into pure qi energy. When you breathe out, you expel 'dirty qi', which has mixed with any toxins or waste energy inside your chest.

Proper communication between your large intestine and lungs is vital for many of your body's functions. 'Lung qi "descends", meaning it gives your large intestine the necessary qi for proper digestion and elimination,' says Stephanie. 'Conversely, the lung's ability to send qi downwards depends on the large intestine's role in getting rid of waste.' When the large intestine and lungs work in harmony, your body is better able to expel toxins, which, in turn, bolsters your immune system. The descension and expulsion of stagnant qi also results in an energy lift, so you feel revitalised.

IN TUNE WITH THE SEASON

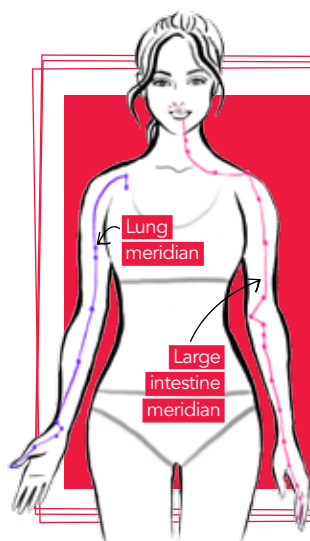
ATCM member Olivia Shaw says there are simple ways you can incorporate aspects of Chinese medicine into your everyday life. 'First off, you need to make sure you're eating plenty of nutritious and fibre-rich food, and that you're having regular bowel movements,' she says. 'A good way to ensure this is to eat ground linseeds (flaxseeds). They're good sprinkled on porridge or soups, or you can soak the whole seeds in water overnight then stir the mixture into yoghurt or porridge in the morning. Remember, it's important to drink plenty of water when using either ground or whole flaxseeds, to keep everything moving.'

As well as foods, herbal remedies, teas, breath-centred movements such as yoga and t'ai chi, plus other mindful activities all help to give you a boost. 'TCM is about maintaining balance in your life and living in tune with the transition of the seasons,' says Olivia. 'Autumn takes us from a period of exuberance, high energy and growth in the summer, to a slightly more introverted, quieter time for gathering energy. for the chillier months ahead.'

EASY WAYS TO renew & energise THIS AUTUMN

DRINK OOLONG

Oolong is a traditional Chinese tea that combines green and black leaves for a drink that's rich in antioxidants, the substances that keep cells healthy. Served lukewarm, it can stimulate your nervous system, which promotes a feeling of vitality. Add a touch of fresh ginger – one of TCM's 'warm foods' to boost immunity and aid your digestive system.



Going with the flow

Meridians are the pathways for energy to pass through. Keep them clear and they work in harmony. There are 12 main meridians – lung, large intestine, small intestine, spleen, stomach, heart, bladder, kidney, pericardium, triple warmer, liver and gallbladder, and each is a virtual hotspot for qi. Dotted among those routes, however, are a further 400 acupressure points. When stimulated either with pressure, known as acupressure, or tiny needles in an acupuncture session, these points on your body restore balance if any areas are off-kilter.

PRACTISE T'AI CHI

Despite its gentle nature, the ancient practice of t'ai chi is in fact a martial art. Seen as meditating through movement, the flowing sequences cleanse the body of toxins and increase the flow of qi. If you're new to t'ai chi, try a few simple exercises to begin with. Practising among nature is the ideal place, which explains why you may see groups of people in parks practising together.

Choose a spot where you won't be disturbed and try the following simple exercise:

- Place your feet parallel and a little more than shoulder-width apart, arms at your side. Slowly rotate your hips to the right and left and follow this movement with your arms. Relax your arms until they almost flap against your body as you twist, enjoying the sensation of letting go of any tension in your joints.

Find your nearest t'ai chi group at taichifinder.co.uk.



EAT FLAVOURFUL FOODS

'Each of your organs has a flavour associated with it, and because autumn's metal element is pungent, fill up on sharp, strong and spicy foods that will warm you inside as the weather begins to cool outside,' says Olivia.

Onion, garlic, paprika, turmeric and ginger help to increase circulation and maintain warmth. Slow-cooked stews and soups are ideal meals to include them in, and cooking things slowly makes them easier for your large intestine to digest, too.



USE POSITIVE VISUALISATION

- Try this to enhance the letting go process: 'Take a few moments to look at a picture that makes you feel recharged, for example a seascape or a meadow with clouds in the background,' says mindfulness coach Mita Mistry. 'Imagine putting any negative thoughts you need to let go of onto that cloud, and let it float away, enjoying the peace that washes over you. Breathe deeply and slowly, and stay with that feeling of your body and mind being

cleansed of negativity.'

For an extra meridian boost, include the colour off-white and white in your visualisations, as these represent the large intestine and lung respectively. You could also try the following: Take a few deep breaths and let your mind clear. When you are feeling settled, tell yourself; 'I let go of everything that does not serve my happiness'. Repeat for as long as you want or need to.



STIMULATE YOUR ACUPRESSURE POINTS

Applying pressure to certain points on your body, through your fingertips, is an effective way to gently detox. While there are hundreds of acupressure points on your body, you only need to focus on a couple for a quick boost. 'Different points have different functions and can be used in different combinations,' says Olivia. 'For example, if you had a cold you could stimulate Large Intestine 4 found in the web between your thumb and forefinger.'

VALUE YOURSELF

The metal element of autumn is associated with self-worth in TCM, so take time to focus on what you've achieved so far, both this year and in life, and think about what to remove from your environment to help you feel emotionally lighter. Also, treat yourself with the kindness you deserve – take a walk, book a massage, take up a new yoga class or try a bit of acupuncture to detox both physically and emotionally.

SLEEP LONGER

TCM encourages us to live more in sync with the natural world, and while you don't need to go into full hibernation like some animals, you do need to ensure you get enough sleep so you feel fully restored. The best way to do this is to ensure you're not going to be disturbed, that your room is not too hot or too cold and your bed covers are made with natural rather than synthetic fibres, which help to regulate body temperature by absorbing perspiration. Take time to unwind for bed – a cup of peppermint tea will soothe and ease the digestive system.



PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK, GETTY, ALAMY. *PREGNANT WOMEN SHOULD NOT USE THIS PRESSURE POINT.



PRACTISE BREATHING EXERCISES

Breath-focused activities in TCM concentrate on mentally moving energy through the lung meridian to strengthen their function and cleanse the rest of your body. Do this short breathing exercise up to three times a day:

- Breathe in through your nose – as much air as you can – feeling it fill the space in your abdomen. Hold your lungs full for a count of five, then breathe out through your mouth until your lungs feel totally empty. As you breath out, make a 'ssssssss' noise with your tongue – this is considered a healing sound for the lung meridian! 🍎