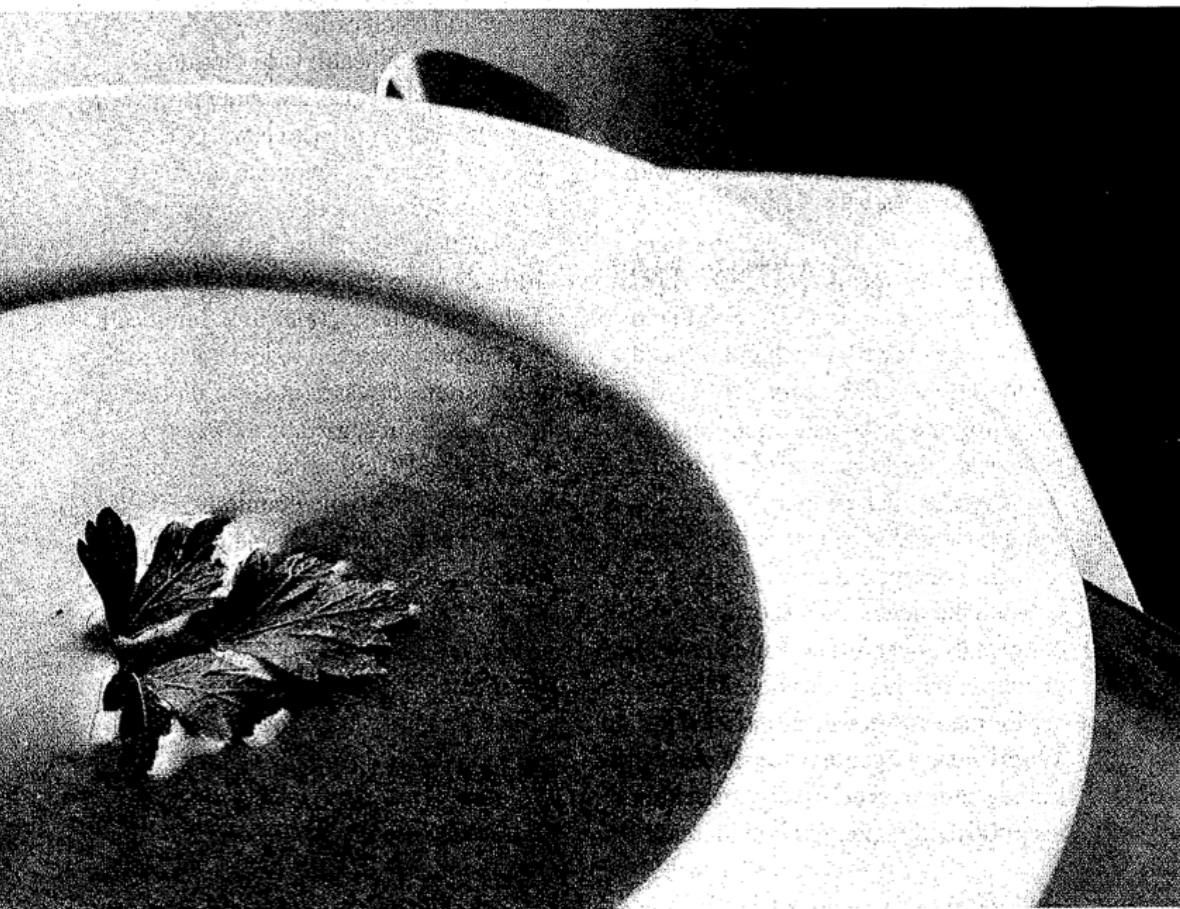


Keep the Home Fires Burning

Stoke your energy with warming foods from Traditional Chinese Medicine.

By Janet Webb Lee



The heating quality of gingery pumpkin soup fortifies digestion during cold winter months.

You've taken the winter clothes out of storage, shoveled the snow, lit a fire, and settled in for a comforting bowl of ... salad?

Cooked warm foods just seem natural in colder weather as they complement both our bodies and the season. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), they are beneficial year-round, supporting the digestive processes that fuel everything we do.

Similar to ayurveda's concept of *agni* or digestive fire, TCM views food as fuel and the body as a stove. Just as a stove maintains an ever-burning pilot light that sparks the fire, the kidneys

are the body's pilot light, a force that is the root of all life for every organ, encompassing both yin and yang. The stomach acts as a cooking vessel, while the spleen provides the fire that transforms food into energy.

The spleen, in TCM terms, transforms the pure part of food, the nutrients, into blood and *chi*, or energy, while sending waste to the intestines for elimination. Eating cold and raw fare dilutes this inherently warm process and slows digestion: the body retains fluid, metabolism decreases, your fire and energy fade. Manifestations can include bloating, weight gain, fa-

tigue, and cold hands and feet.

During the winter when you need more energy to resist cold, it's even more important to eat warming foods. You can keep the home fires burning with readily available foods and spices. Aromatic herbs like ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom help the body dispose of unwanted fluids, while warming the body and strengthening digestion. Traditional congee or rice porridges incorporate medicinal food or herbs into easily digestible dishes. Rice strengthens the spleen, and walnuts and chestnuts stoke the body's yang, or warming energy. >>

Remedies from Your Pantry

These common foods and spices are medicinal powerhouses in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Cinnamon: Spicy cinnamon warms and circulates blood, relieves pain, helps rid the body of pathological fluids, and benefits those with diabetes.

Ginger: Ginger tea is a go-to immune booster and regulator for queasy stomachs. It helps to expel certain types of cold and flu bugs and reduces phlegm.

Walnuts: These nutritious morsels strengthen the kidneys, help combat chronic coughs, and relieve pain in the knees and low back. —J.L.

Ginger is a powerful digestive regulator. Combine it with pumpkin, another digestive strengthener, and you'll have a warming bowl of soup. According to *Ancient Wisdom, Modern Kitchen* by Yuan Wang, Warren Sheir, and Mika Ono, ginger also beautifies the skin, relieves constipation, and lowers blood sugar.

Cinnamon, used in this traditional Korean tea, assists circulation and helps

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maintain that pilot light in the kidneys—the foundation of life.

Learning which foods benefit your body's unique needs can turn every meal into a delicious opportunity to strengthen your health and keep warm all winter long—from the inside out.

Gingery Pumpkin Soup

Serves 4

10 to 12 ounces pumpkin or winter squash (2 cups cubed)
6 whole cloves
2 ½ cups vegetable stock
2 tablespoons oil

1 small onion, diced
2 to 3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1- to 2-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and minced
½ cup unflavored soy or other milk substitute
Pinch salt and pepper

Topping: ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves, stemmed

1 Seed, peel, and chop the pumpkin into 1-inch cubes. You can also combine the pumpkin with yams or carrots.

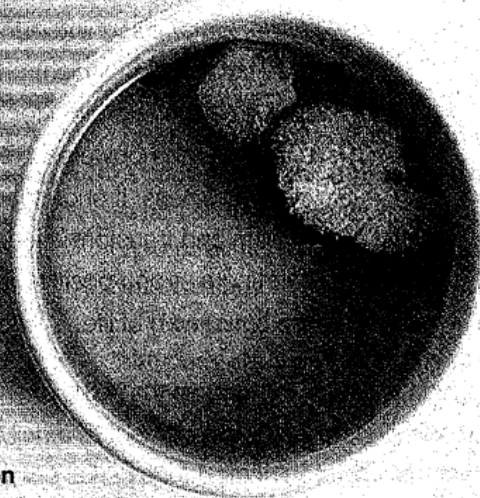
2 Combine the pumpkin, cloves, and stock in a pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes.

3 Add the onion, garlic, and ginger. Cook until the onions are translucent and soft (about 5 minutes).

4 Remove the cloves from the pumpkin broth (they will float to the top).

5 Combine the pumpkin and onion mixture with the soy milk in a blender or a food processor until smoothly pureed. Add salt and pepper to taste.

6 Sprinkle with cilantro leaves.



Brew an aromatic cup of cinnamon tea laced with ginger to boost your immune system.

Cinnamon Chestnut Congee

Serves 4

- 6 fresh unshelled chestnuts
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- ½ cup uncooked short-grain rice, rinsed and drained
- ¼ teaspoon salt (optional)
- 4 to 5 cups water
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, or to taste

1 Boil the chestnuts for half an hour. Remove from the water and halve (a serrated knife is best). Scoop out the flesh with a spoon, discarding the skins and shells. Chop the chestnuts into ¼-inch pieces.

2 Combine the walnuts, chestnuts, rice, and salt (optional) with the water in a pot.

3 Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer with the lid slightly ajar for 45 to 60 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add water, if necessary, to keep the congee from sticking to the pot.

4 Add the cinnamon and cook for 2 to 3 minutes; top with honey or other natural sweetener, if desired, and serve.

Scintillating Cinnamon Tea

Serves 2

- 1 stick (5 grams) cinnamon
- 1 inch-long piece fresh ginger, peeled and cut into ¼-inch slices
- 2 cups water
- 3 or 4 pine nuts

1 Combine the cinnamon, ginger, and water in a pot; cover and bring to a boil.

2 Lower the heat and simmer for about 15 minutes, or until desired strength.

3 Strain the ginger and cinnamon, or remove them with a slotted spoon.

4 Add honey, if desired, and garnish with pine nuts. ■

Adapted from Ancient Wisdom, Modern Kitchen: Recipes from the East for Health, Healing, and Long Life by Yuan Wang, Warren Sbeir, and Mika Ono. ©1262322000000 Yuan Wang, Warren Sbeir, Mika Ono. Reprinted by permission of Da Capo Lifelong Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group.

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