



## **Vegetarianism and Chinese Medicine Diet Therapy**

Perhaps surprisingly, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short) doesn't recommend a vegetarian diet for all people. More important than vegetarianism for TCM is a diet centred around cooked foods. It was also built on the assumptions of seasonal variation in the diet and reliance on locally produced, fresh foods.

Vegetarianism, however is no stranger to TCM. China and India have the world's longest traditions of vegetarian diets due to the influence of Buddhism. In both of these cultures, there is an understanding that it is important to replace the qualities that animal foods have to maintain a healthy balance in your diet.

For TCM, like other traditional healing systems, the qualities of the various foods reflect the food's digestibility, metabolic effects and a food's overall therapeutic effect. The primary qualities of animal foods are that they are warming and nutritionally dense. This is in contrast to plant based foods that are cooling and dispersing.

Mushrooms are given special consideration in China for vegetarians because although they are a plant, they grow by consuming other plants. As a result they share meat's nutritionally dense qualities. Tofu is another important vegetarian food since it is nutrient dense like meats. It is however considered a cooling food as opposed to a warming food. To moderate this tofu is commonly baked or fried or combined with warming spices such as chilies or ginger.

In India, complex combinations of spices like cayenne, cumin, coriander and ginger are combined with oils and nutrient dense beans to create rich and warming curries.

In addition, herbal tonics are a regular part of these traditional diets. In Chinese households it was common to have Dang Gui (chinese angelica) and other tonic herbs on hand as part of regular self-care health practices.

Below are suggestions of several food choices that can be incorporated into a vegetarian diet.



### **Protein & vitamin B12**

beans and grains, nuts and seeds, dairy, nutritional yeast, eggs

easier to digest beans: aduki, lentils, mung beans, peas

harder to digest beans: kidney, black-eyed peas, chickpeas, lima beans, black beans (hardest to digest are soybeans and black soybeans)



### **Warming foods:**

ginger, pepper, cumin, cardamom, coriander, fennel, basil, thyme, oregano orange peel, etc.

fermented foods such as Kimchee, sauerkraut, yogurt, sourdough breads, miso onions, garlic, shallots, chives, green onions



### **Nutritionally dense foods**

mushrooms such as shitake, oyster, portabellos, and wood ear, dairy, tofu, indian curries, seaweeds, quinoa, sesame seeds, tempeh, lychee fruit

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### **Disclaimer**

*This factsheet is not intended to diagnose or assess. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.*