tips for winter yin/yang balance

- Listen to your body and be gentle with it; rest/relax as needed
- Use to season to focus inward and nourish Yin through quiet meditation, introspection, walking in the woods, etc.
- 'Stay active enough to keep the spine and joints flexible' (Pitchford). Do whatever you enjoy – regular, moderate physical activity is better than pushing yourself too hard
- Laugh! Cultivate joy! Spend time with company you enjoy. Or watch comedies.
- Layer up, get outside. Sit near windows. Get natural light, especially in the morning.
- You may need to rest or sleep more than in the warm seasons. Try to sleep earlier so that you can wake up earlier and enjoy the most daylight (keep your circadian clock going).
- Keep lower body warm (lower back and abdomen, legs and feet) – wear enough layers and use a hot water bottle, heat pad or moxa stick on that area
- Get into 'parasympathetic nervous system' mode (i.e. relaxed) as often as you can: massages and bodywork, slow stretching, deep breathing, sex, baths, etc.
- Reach out:
  - acupuncture is effective for relaxing and improving mood. Check out my website soon (paulinehwang.ca) for links to affordable acupuncture and other resources
  - talk to a naturopath or holistic (non-TCM) nutritionist for supplement recommendations. It's beyond my scope of practice to prescribe supplements, but I believe vitamins like Vitamin D would be vital for everyone living here...
- Work on fears and insecurities; cultivate patience, persistance and willpower

more resources

THE incredible nutritional resource from an integrative TCM perspective:

Excellent simple articles are available on the Six Degrees Community Acupuncture website: [http://pokeme.ca](http://pokeme.ca) See 'Self-care Articles', e.g.:
- “Thoughts to Chew On... General Guidelines for Eating Well”
- “Seasonal Awareness”
- “How to Stay Healthy this Winter”
- “Beat the Winter Blahs”
- “Food as Medicine”

Another good short article on TCM guidelines for winter diet:

Pauline Sok Yin Hwang, [http://paulinehwang.ca](http://paulinehwang.ca)
'Care for caregivers and changemakers' using acupuncture, nutrition, massage, and meditation.
5 winter food tips from traditional Chinese medicine

DISCLAIMER: This is generalized information and doesn't replace the importance of having a personalized assessment by a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner, and a therapeutic food plan specifically for your constitution (yin/yang, hot/cool, dry/moist, organ system balances, etc.). To address specific health issues that are bothering you, a more personalized TCM diet should take priority over these general / seasonal ones.

1) How we eat is at least as important as what. Mindful eating (paying attention to tastes, textures, smells, etc. while eating) is the single best 'dietary' change we can make. A keen ear for your body's messages is more important than memorizing all the rules in a nutrition textbook. Also, relaxed eating is good from both the Chinese medicine and biomedicine point of view. When you're stressed and in 'sympathetic nervous system' (i.e. 'fight or flight' mode), your body shifts blood circulation away from digestive functions. Stress reduces stomach acid levels, hampering digestion and absorption. In Chinese medicine, not only stress but any 'pensiveness' interferes with digestion (you digest 'thoughts' as well as the food). So, don't stress about what you eat! Nourish yourself with a kind, loving, accepting, and gentle attitude. Eating a slow meal with yourself in quiet, or relaxing with good friends is excellent. Deliciousness and joy is important for nutrition too!

2) Have a bit of each of the 5 flavours daily, but slightly more salty and bitter flavours in the winter. The 5 flavours are: sweet, salty, sour, pungent (a.k.a. acrid/spicy), and bitter. The 'sweet' flavour means the 'full sweet' tastes of grains, vegetables, etc. (not 'empty sweets' of sugars, desserts, etc.), and this flavour should predominate in all seasons. In the winter, however, a slight increase in the salty and bitter flavours can benefit the Kidney-adrenals and the Heart (closely tied to our mental-emotional state). Some foods with bitter (and other) tastes include: kale, turnip, celery, asparagus, burdock root, carrot top, lettuce, watercress, parsley, endive, rye, oats, quinoa, chicory root, and many herbs. Salty foods include seaweeds, salt, millet, barley, miso, etc.

3) Eat to minimize 'Dampness.' Dampness = fluid where it's not supposed to be... phlegm/mucus-type stuff, edema, cysts, tumours, yeasts, etc. Dampness leads to feeling heavy/sluggish/foggy (physically and mentally); it impairs your digestive 'fire' and overall warmth/energy; and it contributes to allergies, low immunity, and chronic illnesses. Damp-causing foods include: dairy (especially cow), almost all sugars (including most fruit), wheat (sprouting helps), overly-salty food, meats and eggs, most fats and oils, yeasted breads, alcohol (i.e. liquid sugar), food that is hard to digest (raw, cold, inadequately chewed, etc.), and refined, processed, stale or rancid food (including most commercially shelled nuts and seeds, especially peanuts). Eating excessive amounts, overly complex meals, and late at night also contribute to Dampness, as do toxins, anxiety and worry!

4) Eat warmer and protect your digestive fire. In winter, it is best to cook foods longer, at lower temperatures, and using less water. These factors increase the meal's warming qualities. Making your food "warmer" and easier to digest will preserve your 'digestive fire' and help you absorb more nutrients. Easier to digest = (1) at least slightly cooked or broken down, (2) in moderate amounts ("until 70% full"), in simple combinations (unless all cooked in the same pot like a stew or soup), (3) warm in temperature, and (4) well-chewed. If you have cold signs, eat warming foods such as oats, parsnips, mustard greens, winter squash, butter, quinoa, walnuts, onion family, chicken, lamb, trout and salmon. Warming spices include dried ginger, cinnamon, cloves, fenugreek seeds, fennel. Food that is too 'hot' actually releases warmth and cools you (e.g. chilies, hot peppers).

5) Be Kind to your Kidneys. Eat dried foods, small dark beans (adzuki, black beans, etc.), seaweeds, and steamed winter greens. Many of the warming foods listed in #4 increase Kidney Yang. Seaweeds, millet, barley, and most beans increase Kidney Yin. Legumes and black/blue foods are generally good for the Kidney-adrenals. See the bone marrow soup recipe. Avoid toxins in food and water, as well as intoxicants and heavy metals. Meditate regularly, and keep your lower trunk and legs warm! (See my "Tips for Winter Yin/Yang balance)

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Eating “Warmer”

Every food has a 'thermal' nature. When we talk about 'cold' or 'warm' foods in Chinese medicine, we aren't just referring to physical temperature. Foods are generally 'warmer' when they:

1. are cooked for longer periods of time, or with more heat/pressure/dryness
   • from hottest to coolest: deep-frying, baking, stir-frying/sauteing, pressure cooking, simmering, steaming, waterless cooking, fermenting, marinating, sprouting
2. come from plants that take longer to grow (carrot, rutabaga, parsnip, cabbage, ginseng, plants that don't use chemical fertilizers to make them grow faster). Generally summer fruits and veggies are cooler than fall/winter ones
3. are chewed more thoroughly
4. are eaten warm rather than cold (in temperature)
5. are cooked rather than raw
6. are red, orange or yellow (versus blue, green or purple)
7. are broken down more in preparation (chopping, pounding, grinding, etc.)

Examples of specific foods classified as 'warming' include:

- dried ginger
- black beans
- aduki beans
- lentils
- cinnamon bark or twig
- cloves
- basil
- rosemary
- oats
- spelt
- quinoa
- sunflower seed
- sesame seed
- walnut
- pinenut
- chestnut
- fennel
- dill
- anise
- caraway
- carob pod
- cumin
- sweet brown rice and products (e.g. mochi)
- parsley
- mustard greens
- winter squash
- sweet potato
- kale
- onion family (leek, chive, garlic, scallion)
- cherry
- citrus peel
- date
- butter
- mussel
- trout
- chicken
- beef
- lamb
- small pinches of hot peppers, warm unrefined sweeteners (molasses, barley malt, rice syrup) – too much will be cooling

A note on meat-eating

Especially in the winter, *small amounts* of meat or meat products may be helpful for some who are more on the 'deficient' and 'cold' side, as they are generally 'warmer' than vegetables. However, if suitable to your constitution, small quanties are likely best, with the vast majority of the diet still from plant sources. Making a stock or soup from bones or a few pieces of meat can provide the 'Yang' (warming) qualities, without the sticky/heavy effect that excess meat produces. Cracking meat bones will allow you to make a 'bone marrow' soup which is excellent for nourishing your Kidneys.

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More Recipes for the Winter and for your Kidney-Adrenals!

Winter Sunshine Soup: A good soup to brighten your day
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

- 1 cup yellow split peas, soaked
- 2 quarts water
- 1 5-inch piece kombu*, soaked
- 1/2 onion, cut into crescent moons (optional)
- 2 carrots, cut into flowers
- 1 cup winter squash, diced
- 1/2 cup parsley, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Miso to taste

• Place kombu and peas in a pot with water
• Bring to scald. Reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes.
• Add onion, carrots, squash, and salt. Simmer until peas and vegetables are tender.
• Add miso diluted in stock and simmer 5 minutes more.
• Serves 8

Baked Vegetables in Nut Gravy
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

- 1/4 onion, minced (optional)
- 1 clove garlic, minced (optional)
- 1 teaspoon oil (optional)
- 2 rutabagas, diced
- 4 parsnips, diced
- 2-3 tablespoons ground nuts or seeds (fresh)
- 1/2 teaspoon kelp powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1/2 cup water

• Preheat oven to 350 F.
• Saute onion and garlic 1 minute.
• Add rutabagas and parsnips. Saute 5 minutes more (optional).
• Combine nuts, kelp*, cinnamon and soy sauce with water.
• Transfer vegetables to a casserole dish that has been lightly brushed with oil / lecithin.
• Cover with gravy. Cover and bake 30-40 minutes. Serves 4.

Winter salad: Cooked Pressed Salad
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

- Use one or more leafy greens: kale, bok choy, chard, watercress, cabbage, or parsley.
- Plunge whole leaves into scalding water and cook 2-3 minutes.
  - Method 1: Roll leaves in a bamboo mat and press out excess water.
- Chop finely.
- Add miso, toasted nuts or seeds, or salad dressing.

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Hearty Black Beans
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

2 cups black (turtle) beans, soaked 1 1/2 tsp ground cumin
3 1/2 cups water 1 tsp oil (optional)
1/4 onion, chopped (optional) 1/2 tsp sea salt
1 clove garlic, minced (optional) Pinch of cayenne
1 tsp ground coriander Juice of 1/2 lemon

• Place beans in water. Bring to boil. Cover.
• Reduce heat and simmer 1 hour.
• Saute onion, garlic, coriander and cumin.
• Add to beans
• Add salt, cayenne and lemon juice.
• Continue cooking until beans are done.
• Serves 4.

Wakame*-Sesame Seed Mixture (condiment)
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

Roast 1 ounce wakame in oven at 350 F for 10-15 minutes until dark and crispy. Grind to a fine powder, in mortar and pestle or suribachi using even, gentle pressure in a circular motion. Dry-toast sesame seeds in skillet over medium heat, until they have a nutty aroma and begin to pop. Add to wakame and grind until seeds are 90% crushed. (Can do the same with 1 ounce dry-toasted dulse).

Bone Marrow Soup (for Kidney Essence / Longevity)
From Paul Pitchford, Healing with Whole Foods.

Use bones from an organically-raised animal (poultry preferred). Break the bones and cook them just below boiling for 18 hours. Add water as necessary. Root vegetables, slightly acid vegetables (e.g. carrots, celery, squash, beets), and seaweeds* help to extract minerals and nutrients from the bones and their marrows into the broth. A tablespoon of apple cider vinegar or lemon juice will do the same. When cooked, remove the bones and use this broth alone, or as a liquid base for other foods.

*Pauline’s Note: Seaweeds (kelp, kombu, wakame, hijiki, dulse, etc.) and micro-algaees (chlorella, spirulina, wild blue-green algae, etc.) are excellent for building Kidney Yin. They are an excellent source of protein, vitamin A, nucleic acids, chlorophyll, and essential minerals like calcium, iodine, magnesium, iron, etc. They also detoxify the body, reduce phlegm and masses (e.g. tumours), and have many other excellent qualities. They should be used with caution for very 'Cold' type constitutions, as they are generally thermally cold (Chlorella is least cold of the micro-algaees, less extreme, and generally safe to take). Seaweeds can be added to legumes and grains while cooking, or to soups, stews, etc. directly.

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Organic Brown Rice Kitchari
From Amrita Sondhi, The Modern Ayurvedic Cookbook.

1/2 cup organic short-grain brown rice
1/4 cup split mung dal*
salt to taste

1/4 tsp turmeric (optional)
2 cups water
2 tsp flax or hemp oil (or ghee or butter)

In a medium pot on high heat, combine all ingredients, except oil, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, cover with lid, and cook for 45 minutes. Let sit covered for 5 minutes. Drizzle with oil before serving.

Makes 2-3 servings.

*If you have time, soak the split mung dal in 1/2 cup water for a few hours before cooking and drain before using. This activates the seed, increasing the nutrients and digestibility.

[Pauline's note: This recipe is not specifically warming, but grounding, strengthening, cleansing and nourishing. If you find the split mung dal that still has the green skin on it (e.g. in Chinatown), the skin is more detoxifying than the inside of the bean.]

Beat the Cold Soup
From Amrita Sondhi, The Modern Ayurvedic Cookbook.

1 tbsp good oil
1/2 cup onions, chopped
3 tsp fresh ginger, minced
2 tsp fresh green chilies, minced (optional)
2 tsp garlic, minced
1/2 cup celery, diced
1/2 cup carrots, diced
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
1/2 tsp turmeric
1/2 tsp garam masala
1/2 cup mushrooms, chopped

3/4 cup zucchini, chopped
1/4 cup tomatoes, diced
2 cups vegetable stock
4 whole peppercorns
2 cloves
1 cup broccoli and cauliflower florets (mixed)
Juice of 1 lemon
Salt to taste
1/4 cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped (for garnish)

In a large pot on medium-high, heat oil. Add onions, ginger, and green chilies and saute until onions start to soften, about 4 minutes. Stir in garlic and celery and continue to saute for a few minutes. Add carrots, cayenne, turmeric and garam masala and saute for a few more minutes. Add mushrooms and zucchini and saute for another minute. Stir in tomatoes and saute for an additional minute. Add vegetable stock, peppercorns, and cloves, then reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add broccoli and cauliflower florets and cook for another 7 minutes until softened. Just before soup is done, stir in lemon juice and salt to taste. Remove peppercorns, garnish with cilantro and serve.

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A Tasty Soup for Warming your Kidney Qi

Warming Black Bean & Azuki Vegetable Stew
(gluten free, vegan, acid friendly)

From Six Degrees Community Acupuncture pokeme.ca.
Compiled by Stacey Hess and Lamia Gibson

Full of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and protein; this soup will warm you up and start you off on the right foot for a healthy and warm winter season!

4 cups of butternut squash, peeled and cubed (or any other winter squash)
4 cups broccoli florets and stems, chopped (fresh or frozen)
2 cups cooked black beans
1/2 cup cooked azuki beans
2 shallots or 1/2 small onion, finely chopped
2 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground ginger
OPTIONAL: 1 tbsp chickpea tamari
1 quart water, broth or leftover bean cooking liquid
1-2 tbsp ghee, olive oils, sesame oil, or coconut oil
GARNISH: 2 scallions, thinly sliced

Prepare vegetables as directed. In a large soup pot, heat oil until hot, then add cumin seeds. Heat until fragrant, turn heat to medium-low and add scallions. Saute until tender, then add coriander and ginger, and stir. Add butternut and saute for 2-3 minutes. Then add liquid and cook until butternut is almost tender. Add cooked beans and broccoli, and simmer until all vegetables are tender. Add tamari if using and adjust seasonings to taste. Serve hot, garnished with thinly sliced scallion. ENJOY!

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Warming Black Bean & Azuki Vegetable Stew, cont'd

**HOW IT HELPS.....**

**Squash** - warming, sweet flavour influences the spleen and stomach (promoting good digestion), improves Qi circulation. High in vitamin A

**Broccoli** - cooling (helps balance the soup), brightens the eyes, more vitamin C than citrus, enters the spleen, stomach and bladder channels (supporting digestion and purification)

**Black beans** - warming, beneficial to kidneys and reproductive function, builds yin fluids and blood. Used for low back ache, knee pain and infertility

**Azuki or (adzuki) beans** - neutral, influences the heart and small intestine (aids in circulations), tonifies the kidney-adrenal system, detoxifies the body, disperses stagnant blood, reduces swelling. Useful for damp conditions as it is drying

**Onions** - lowers blood pressure and cholesterol, decreases phlegm and inflammation of the nose and throat, inhibits allergic reactions, induces sweating and is a cure for the common cold

**Cumin** - warming, helps diminish flatulence in bean dishes

**Coriander** - warming, drying, useful for damp conditions. Aids the digestion of winter squash

**Ginger** - acrid and hot, warms the center and dispels cold, helps diminish flatulence in bean dishes. Dried ginger feeds the properties of foods and herbs to the lower extremities - the colon, kidneys, ovaries sexual organs and legs

**Ghee** - according to Ayurvedic medicine ghee (clarified butter) enhances the ojas, an essence that governs the tissues of the body and balances hormones. Ojas can be compared to the jing essence in Chinese medicine which is eternally connected with our kidney energy. Also promotes the healing of injuries and gastro-intestinal inflammations such as ulcers and colitis and increases "digestive fire"

**Olive oil** - enters the lung and stomach channel. Can help to moisten the lungs

**Sesame oil** - neutral, enters the live and kidney channels. Moistening

**Coconut oil** - warming, enters the spleen, stomach and large intestine channels, moistening

Above information compiled and written by Stacey Hess and Lamia Gibson. Recipe and further resources available at [pokeme.ca](http://pokeme.ca)

*Pauline Sok Yin Hwang, [http://paulinehwang.ca](http://paulinehwang.ca)*

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More Warming Meal Ideas
especially for cold, tired, sluggish, depressed types :)

(As you read the explanations, please remember the 'Kidney', 'Spleen', 'Liver', etc. in TCM are not the same as your anatomical kidney, spleen and liver!)

Breakfast cereal of quinoa, cooked with raspberries and cinnamon. If creamy texture desired, use rice milk or almond milk. If sweetener desired, can use molasses, barley malt, or rice syrup.

• Quinoa is a nutrient-dense, warming grain that specifically tonifies Kidney Yang. Classified as sweet, with some sour and bitter, it strengthens the Spleen, while helping clear stagnancy or greasiness in the Liver, and draining dampness that may tend to accumulate with a cold Spleen and Kidney.
• Raspberries benefit the Liver and Kidneys, and support the Blood.
• Cinnamon is a deeply warming, anti-oxidant, pungent-flavoured spice (also helping to clear a sluggish Liver). Dried ginger is also deeply warming and pungent.
• Rice milk and almond milk are less likely than dairy to lead to Dampness. Moderate amounts of unrefined sweeteners can be warming, especially the choices given.

Carrot and ginger soup, with onions, garlic. Eat with whole rye as grain. Can make with a meat stock e.g. beef or chicken stock, or use bay leaf to flavour.

• Carrot is neutral, sweet, strengthens the Spleen, improves Liver function, and treats indigestion. Carrots also contain a lot of anti-oxidant Vitamin A, many other vitamins and minerals, including magnesium (necessary for muscle relaxation).
• Ginger is a warming (especially dried) and a pungent spice (also helping to clear a sluggish Liver).
• Garlic, like onions is mildly pungent and warming, disperses stagnant Liver Qi, promotes warmth, and expels coldness. Cooking the soup in a meat stock provides the Yang, warming energy of the meat, without the stagnancy that excess meat-eating can create in the Liver.
• Bay leaf helps stimulate the Liver out of stagnancy.
• Rye is a neutral, bitter grain that drains dampness and excess water, clears Liver stagnancy, increases strength, and affects the Liver, Gallbladder, and Spleen. Rye also contains iron, magnesium, and numerous other nutrients.

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two simple meditations
to help your kidney-adrenals

Qi Gong Standing
1. Stand with feet parallel, shoulder-width apart
2. Bend knees and waist slightly as if about to sit on an invisible chair
3. Lift top of head to elongate spine, tuck chin and shift weight forward slightly until weight is over centre of feet
4. Keep eyes half-closed and directed toward the ground ~2 feet in front of you.
5. Relax whole body; only tension should be in front of thighs and spine to hold you up. Relax the rest, and let body weight sink.
6. (optional) Raise arms as if hugging a tree (keep shoulders relaxed)
7. Let thoughts go, focus on breathing in and out of your 'dantian' (2 inches below the navel, between the front and back of your body). Observe any sensations you feel in the dantian area.

Notes: If your legs shake, take a break. You can gradually do this for longer. This exercise has many many health benefits. Look up “standing on stake” (there are different variations).

Waking up your Kidneys
1. Assume same standing posture as above.
2. Relax your hands into a half-fist.
3. Gently knock on your back with both hands to 'wake up your kidneys' (at base of the ribcage).
4. Let yourself groan while you do this.
5. Rub hands together (in front of you) to warm and put energy in them.
6. Cover lower back with your hands and breathe the energy into your kidneys.
7. Repeat 6 or 9 times. Best in the mornings!

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