

The supernatural forces of summer create heat in the Heavens and fire on Earth; they create the heart and the pulse within the body...they create the bitter flavor, and the emotions of happiness and joy

-The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine

Summer from a Chinese Medicine perspective

Psyche and body shift to suit the rhythms of the seasons. In Summer we shed the heavy boots needed for snow, allowing naked feet to feel the sand sneaking between our toes as we meander along the edge of the beach. Just as the butterfly escapes the protective, constricting cocoon of the caterpillar, we leave behind the slower, inward focus characteristic of winter to witness this time when plants and creatures develop to their fullest potential for splendor and fulfillment. Yang is dominant—light, warmth, activity, and interaction peak. A brilliant sun climbs to its zenith amidst the hum of bees buzzing. The Heart is the organ system that shares the power of summer. As the sun accelerates the life streams of the earth, the Heart squeezes the living juices of the blood through the vessels, imbuing the body with awareness.

Summer represents the universal and enveloping space into which we grow and expand

Summer and Winter, Heart and Kidney, are like two ends of a rainbow, distinct and unfathomable, drawing between them the multicolored luminous ribbon of our being, a dimension bounded on one end by Yin and the on the other by Yang. Summer, this expansive time of the Heart, represents the universal and enveloping space into which we grow and expand. While the Kidney is seed and root, the Heart is flower and fruit. Like Dionysus, the Kidney is associated with the subconscious, primal forces of nature, whereas like Apollo, Greek god of the sun, the Heart symbolizes wakefulness and the development of wisdom and compassion. In this culmination of the seasons turning, our longing for the womb is met with our reaching for union with the divine.

Connecting our inner life and external universe

In Chinese medicine the Heart is like a benevolent and enlightened head of state, all-knowing and ever-present, devoted to the good of the whole, and responsible for the expression and integration of our life experience as we develop and mature. The Heart propels the blood through the body and envelops the mind. Just as the sun

provides warmth and light for all creation, so the Heart suffuses and permeates the body with consciousness, sensation, and feeling. The Heart connects our inner life and external universe—it is the foundation of the mind and gives rise to our capacity for thought, perception, sensation, speech, communication, and memory. What the Kidney receives through the sense organs, the Heart expresses through speech, the resonance of the voice, radiance of the complexion and sparkle of the eyes.

The Heart is vulnerable to shocking surprise and inordinate sorrow, and these can disrupt the perfusion of blood and the continuity of consciousness. When the Heart has been overwhelmed by emotional trauma, a person may suffer a break with reality, a heart attack, or stroke. If the blood of the Heart is insufficient, even without trauma, the mind loses its place to dwell and the spirit wanders, manifesting as forgetfulness, distraction, restlessness, and disturbed sleep. The Heart becomes overactive and overheated when the Yin or blood is deficient. This may cause incessant talking, disturbing dreams, or disjointed thinking. In order for the Heart to function well, it must remain peaceful. With agitation and unrest there is anxiety, and this further disrupts circulation which, in turn, aggravates confusion. When the Heart is functioning properly, a person has a tranquil mind, good memory, clear senses, restful sleep, and a robust complexion.

Summer vacations to calm the mind and refresh the body

Summer vacations calm the mind and refresh the body. Just as steaming soups that support Yang are what we need in winter, so juicy chard, watercress, asparagus, salads, cucumbers, and fruits that replenish Yin are abundant and good to eat during summer. Dates, lycii berries, and lotus seeds feed the Heart while roasted sesame and sesame oil nourish the blood. It is crucial to balance the focused intensity of work with the reckless abandon of summer play during which the senses assume precedence and the body revels in the splashing of the surf.

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