

Food Therapy to Reduce the Stress of Summer Climate Changes

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) recognize that weather changes such as Wind, Heat, Damp, Dry, or Cold, alone or in combination, can be a source of seasonal stress which can lead to imbalance and disease in the body. In TCM and TCVM, food may be characterized as warming, cooling, neutral, hot, or cold. Changing the diet when the seasons or weather change can help prevent and treat imbalances in the body. Summer brings forth Heat (*Yang*) that is combined with either Dampness (temperate zones, tropics and subtropics) or Dryness (desert and drought areas). During the summer, dry commercial dog foods (*Yang*), dehydrated foods (*Yang*) and foods that produce Heat in the body such as soybean and safflower oils, shrimp, eel, lamb, chicken, chicken liver, beef marrow bone, turmeric, garlic, ginger, rosemary and basil should be avoided. In general during hot summers, foods should be lighter in fat, non-processed, and meat fed raw (especially in dry climates) but at room temperature. Fish, eggs, and tofu are good may be fed as occasional substitutes for meat or added to the meat during dry summer weather. The energetic and therapeutic effects of various foods are reviewed so the TCVM practitioner can design a diet to prevent and treat various imbalances within the body during the onset of Summer Heat. Besides treating imbalances in the body with acupuncture and herbs, a diet change is often an important part of the therapy.

Key Words: TCM; TCVM; Food therapy.

As a culture, we have lost touch with the deeper significance of feeding ourselves and the animals we love. Most people eat what tastes and looks good and satiates their appetites. When we eat too much and begin to feel sick or gain weight, we run to diet books or a popular TV talk show looking for hope and salvation. Food becomes more of an addiction than a benediction or labor of Love.

Veterinarians have been heavily influenced by high pressure marketing “hype” of the commercial pet food industry and the microcosmic scientific perspective on animal nutrition that they have studied in college which focuses on quantities (not qualities) of protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. Only recently, with world-wide food recalls are veterinarians questioning the quality of the ingredients in animal foods. In this paradigm, food is about percentages of ingredients, looks, tastes, ease and convenience. Food is much more than this. People and veterinarians have busy

lives and find it difficult to make conscious food choices for their pets, their families and themselves.

The ancient wisdom of the *Tao* perpetuated through time by TCM and TCVM provides new dimensions of understanding food, how it affects our body and how we and our food sources are affected and influenced by the forces of Earth (*Yin*) and Cosmos (*Yang*).

Understanding the TCM and TCVM concept that “Food is Medicine”, we can create diets that help animals adapt to environmental stress or climatic changes and bring balance and nourishment to their “internal environment” by enhancing the flow of their vital energies (Blood, *Qi*, and Body Fluids).

Back To Nature

The planet Earth (Mother Earth) as a whole is *Yin* and gives birth to life that is dependent upon sustenance from its soils and waters. Plants are nourished by the soil, air, and water, decompose or are eaten by animals, digested and excreted then return transformed to feed the soil. The “creation

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cycle” repeats over, again and again.

Animals and plants evolve and survive nurtured by the geography of their domain. There is a balance and harmony in the system that can be overwhelmed by climate and seasonal changes. To survive and thrive for thousands of years, humans and animals learned to eat differently during times of change.¹ The intelligence of Mother Nature’s transformational and evolutionary processes (*Yang*) usually provided everything needed to eat.

Animals and humans ate what grew and flourished in the area of their domain. They ate what foods (plant or animal) were in “season”. Ancient humans and their evolving domestic dogs learned what sustained their health and what did not in the geographic location they lived, changing how and what they ate with the seasons of the year.²

When the climate became harsh causing food sources to become scarce, animals and humans migrated to other geographical areas that did provide sustenance that enhanced their survival. To adapt to these new areas, their physiology and morphology changed over the centuries.¹

Primitive humans living thousands of years ago were more aware and intimately connected to the growth cycles of plants and the migration patterns of their food sources than modern man. We have lost touch with this reality because many of us just buy pre-packaged and processed foods that appeal to our appetites.

Changing Seasons and Weather Effects

TCM and TCVM characterize weather influences as Wind, Heat, Damp, Dry or Cold which manifest alone or in combination with each other. These changes in weather (especially if sudden, intense, or prolonged) can become the source of seasonal “stress” that leaves the body vulnerable until it can adapt. When these climatic changes are extreme or sudden they can result in disharmonies within the internal environment that result in symptoms of disease (“dis-ease”). If a disease process is already in progress, these changes may exacerbate the disease state and it may become a more serious situation. These characterizations not only describe the condition of the external environment, but also are used to describe the internal metabolic environment of all living beings.³

Each type of weather pattern will manifest in

different patterns of disease. For example, in windy weather, one would expect the body to succumb to colds and flu which can manifest as migratory pains in the head, neck, and muscles. Wind can also combine with Cold, Heat or Damp and create other manifestations of disharmony within the body.

Wind, Heat and Dryness

Other symptoms related to Wind when combined with Dryness or Heat could be skin hypersensitivity and rashes. When Heat and Wind are combined, they may generate or contribute to inflammation in the body causing symptoms such as conjunctivitis, otitis, red rashes, welts, and pyoderma on the dorsal parts of an animal’s skin and body.

Internal Heat disharmonies manifest with symptoms such as thirst, dryness, constipation, stranguria, restlessness, red tongue and fast pulse. Many dogs who continue to eat commercial dry food in the Heat of summer will develop “rising Heat” signs such as “dry hot spots” on the dorsal parts of the skin (head, face, neck and back), ear infections, and tail chewing. Chronic Dryness will cause dry skin, hair, and nails, constipation and scanty urine production with azotemia. Internal Heat will also aggravate Liver (*Qi* Stagnation) and Heart (Deficient *Yin*) problems which manifest as tremors, seizures, and cardiac arrhythmias.

Skin and ear problems are the most prevalent and frustrating conditions veterinarians see in the summer. Ear problems related to Heat and Wind or Dryness will manifest on the external part of the ear and the pinna becomes inflamed, whereas otitis related to Heat and Damp will affect the deep parts of the ear canal and cause thick, purulent exudates. The treatment plan would be to Disperse Heat (and Wind) and Generate Moisture with acupuncture, herbs and food.

Heat and Damp

Whereas Heat rises, Dampness sinks to the lowest part of the body or closest to the Earth and accumulates in an abnormal build up of fluids and excess secretions. Internally, these “accumulations” will lead to Stagnation which leads to “blockages” in the circulation of *Qi*, Body Fluids and Blood.

The combination of warm weather with Dampness (rain, humidity) aggravated by the

feeding of standard commercial diets which promote Internal Heat in the Liver and Gall Bladder and Dampness in the Spleen may manifest as an excess of phlegm and mucous, water retention, and even edema in extreme cases. Arthritic conditions that are aggravated by summer weather in dogs usually appear with heat, swelling, and pain in the tarsal, carpal, and elbow joint areas.

Animals will appear sluggish, oily, malodorous, heavy and lethargic. Their tongue is often enlarged, swollen and purple with a yellow greasy coating. Depending upon other concurrent disharmonies they will have a wiry or slippery/soggy, rapid pulse. Paw chewing and ear scratching are common in these animals due to chronic yeast and purulent bacterial infections which may also manifest on ventral skin areas, axilla or genital areas. Clients may complain about moist “hot spots” that appear suddenly which are commonly diagnosed as “Staph infections” by conventional veterinarians.

Diarrhea, pancreatitis, cystitis, bladder uroliths, gall bladder inflammation, gall bladder stones or sludge, vaginitis and prostatitis may be other manifestations of Damp Heat syndromes. In general, the treatment plan might be to Disperse Heat and Moisture using acupuncture, herbs, and food.

Before a specific TCVM treatment strategy for summer is developed the following must be considered:

1. Current external climatic environment
 - a. Summer Heat with Dampness
 - b. Summer Heat with Dryness
 - c. Summer Heat with Wind / Dryness or Dampness
2. Current Internal Environment of the Patient
 - a. Deficiencies
 - b. Excesses
 - c. Accumulations
 - d. *Yin* symptoms
 - e. *Yang* symptoms
3. Current Diet, Supplements, and Herbs
4. Breed, Age and Lifestyle

Food as Medicine

Besides treating imbalances with acupuncture and herbs, a diet change is important to consider. TCM and TCVM characterize and

acknowledge food by its warming, cooling, neutral, hot, or cold natures. Changing the diet when the seasons and weather change is not a concept understood nor acknowledged by conventional medicine but makes sense from the TCVM perspective. The TCVM practitioner knows the qualities, taste and energetic and therapeutic effects that food has on the body and can design a diet to prevent and treat various “disharmonies” within the body.

In Cold weather, it makes sense that one would want to drink warming liquids and eat warming foods. If Cold is combined with Dryness, then the food needs to also be “moisturizing” and if humans and their dogs are physically active, then foods higher in calories from fat and carbohydrates are needed. For example, the winters of Siberia or Northern climate zones are Cold and Dry. The indigenous people of these regions and their working dogs commonly eat high concentrations of meat and fatty fish, seal, whale and dehydrated wild meats, mixed with rendered fat, nuts, and berries called pemmican. To balance the extremes of a *Yin* winter, they eat food with *Yang* properties to survive. To demonstrate the energetic properties of food for yourself, feel your body sensations when you drink a glass of red wine in the Heat of summer, versus the Cold of winter.

Dietary Considerations for Summer Weather

Summer brings forth Heat that will be combined with either Dampness (temperate zones, tropics and subtropics) or Dryness (desert and drought areas). Occasionally, Wind in the form of storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, or cyclones appear.

In general, during hot weather, “Cooling” foods are necessary to add to a complement of “Neutral” foods to bring equilibrium to the physiological state (homeostasis) of the living body (Table 1).⁴⁻⁹ From the basic strategy to cool the Heat, and neutralize its affects, cooling and neutralizing foods that are either moisturizing (in desert regions) or “drying (in humid and damp regions) are fed.

The typical diets fed to dogs today consist of cooked and rendered fats, mixed with dehydrated or cooked meat, baked in a biscuit of refined flours. Summertime is usually when clients have the most difficult time managing skin problems at home. If you evaluate the dog’s diet, you will see that it will

Table 1: The Effects of Common Foods to Feed in Summer

	Cooling	Neutral	Moisturizing	Moisture Dispersing <i>Diuretic actions</i>
Proteins	Cottage cheese Yogurt Pork Eggs Octopus Clams Rabbit Tofu Lamb liver	Adzuki beans Beef Duck Liver Milk Cheese Mackerel Sardines Herring Cold ocean fish	Cottage cheese Clams Egg Milk Raw beef liver Pork Pork kidney Tofu	Adzuki beans Black beans Duck Pork kidney Beef kidney Mackerel
Starches	Buckwheat Coix (Chinese Barley) Millet Pearl barley Wheat gluten White potato	Brown rice Quinoa (Author: is this warm?) Taro	Millet Quinoa Pumpkin Yams	Amaranth Coix (Chinese Barley) Brown rice Pearl barley Rice bran Rye Taro
Vegetables	Asparagus Bamboo shoots Broccoli Cucumber Eggplant Lettuce Mung beans Sea weed Spirulina Chlorella Spinach Summer squash Swiss Chard Tomato Turnip Watercress Wheat grass Winter Melon White button mushroom Zucchini	Beets Cabbage Carrots Corn	Green pepper White button mushroom Sea weed Tomato	Asparagus Alfalfa sprouts Broccoli Celery Corn Mung beans Turnips Winter Melon Zucchini
Fruits	Apple Banana Coconut Juice Orange Peach Water melon	Mango Papaya	Apple Banana Mango Peach Strawberry Watermelon	Papaya Pineapple
Fats	Avocado	Olive Oil	Sesame oil	

Table 2: Summer Recipes for Dryness

Summer Recipe I (Dry or Damp)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked Barley
- 1 cup of sardine fish (small oily fish) or tuna fish in a can
- 1 raw egg
- ½ cup cooked squash
- 1cup of various leafy vegetables cut up in small pieces
- ½ teaspoon of chlorella, spirulina, kelp, or parmesan cheese (for finicky eaters)

Directions:

- Mix raw egg with pieces of cut up leafy vegetables and green algae, kelp or parmesan mix
- Mix fish with barley and squash
- Then mix everything together

Makes 2 meals for an 11-14 kg dog.

Summer Recipe II (for Dry)

Ingredients:

- 3 cups pork
- 1 cup chicken liver
- 1 cup pearl barley
- 1 cup millet
- 1 cup brown rice
- ½ cup eggplant
- 1 cup broccoli
- 1 cup zucchini squash
- ½ cup celery
- 30 ml tomato paste
- 2 liters of water (approx)
- 3 tablespoon sesame seed oil

Directions:

- Heat oil, add pork and cook meat until brown
- Add 1 liter of water and bring to boil
- Add all the rest ingredients, reduce heat to low, and cover
- Add enough water to cover all of the ingredients
- Stir pot occasionally
- Cook until rice and barley are done
- Stir in 2 raw eggs and mix well (for more active dogs)
- Store food in one day containers in the refrigerator or freezer for later use

1 cup twice daily for a 11-14 kg dog (makes 12 meals)

Figure 2: Summer Recipes for Dampness

Summer Recipe III (for Damp)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked duck (chopped into small pieces)
- ½ cup of peeled and raw cucumber (minced)
- ½ cup of raw chopped up alfalfa sprouts
- ½ cup of steamed broccoli (minced)
- 1 cup of cooked brown rice (cook rice with duck bone broth)
- 1 raw egg

Directions:

- Mix raw egg with cucumber, alfalfa sprouts, and rice
- Mix duck with broccoli and then with everything else
- Let sit for 20 minutes in the refrigerator (allowing all the flavors to blend well)

Makes 2 meals for an 11-14 kg dog

Summer Recipe IV (for Damp)

Ingredients:

- 2 cups beef kidney (chop up and soak in green tea overnight, then rinse well)
- 1 cup of broccoli
- ½ cup celery
- ½ cup canned bamboo shoots
- 1 cup cooked pearl barley
- ½ cup of cooked brown rice
- ½ cup of water (120 ml)
- 4 tablespoons of olive oil

Directions:

- In a wok or frying pan heat oil to medium high and add beef kidney
- Stir well for 5 minutes
- Add water, broccoli, celery and bamboo shoots.
- Cook for another 5 minutes, stirring well
- Add barley and rice, mix in well and remove from heat
- Let sit covered until room temperature

Makes 3 to 4 meals for small dogs

be a large contributing factor to these skin problems which is exacerbated by Staphylococcus bacterial infections, fleas, and ticks which from a TCVM perspective are all considered invading Toxic Heat.

During the summer, dry commercial dog foods (*Yang*), dehydrated foods (*Yang*) and foods that produce Heat in the body such as soybean and safflower oils, shrimp, eel, lamb, chicken, chicken liver, beef marrow bone, turmeric, garlic, ginger,

rosemary and basil should be avoided.

In general during hot summers, foods should be lighter in fat, non-processed and meat fed raw (especially in dry climates) but at room temperature. Fish, eggs, and tofu are good occasional substitutes for meat or may be used in addition to meat during dry summer weather. In Damp climates, moisture resolving foods must be added, whereas, in Dry climates moisturizing foods are used instead (See Table 1).⁴⁻⁹

A general “rule of thumb” to begin formulating diets for dogs can be as follows:

- 1 part protein source (meat, eggs, fish alone or in combination)
- 1 part starch (cooked whole grain or root vegetable)
- 1 part vegetable (1/2 raw leafy greens ½ cooked or steamed: broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, summer squash etc.)

From here, more protein for younger and more active dogs can be added or less for older and less active dogs. If dogs are overweight, reduce the starch by 25% and increase the vegetables. In Tables 2 and 3 are sample recipes for summer dryness and dampness.

After dogs have been on the formulized diet for summer for about 3 weeks, they should be examined, evaluated and treated with acupuncture and herbal formulas to mollify any disharmonies still present. Veterinarians can practice cooking at home for their family and dogs.¹⁰ The more they prepare food at home, the more prepared they will be to explain to clients the importance of home food preparation for the health of their pets.

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TCVM NOTES

The Relationship of Qi and Blood

In Chinese medicine Blood and Qi are inseparable. Qi infuses movement into Blood and Blood carries Qi throughout the body. Blood is primarily derived from the Spleen’s production of Food Qi or *Gu Qi* which is then moved upwards to the Lung. Through the action of Lung Qi, the *Gu Qi* is moved to the Heart where it transformed into Blood. The Kidney is also responsible for Blood production because it stores Essence and Essence generates marrow which, in turn contributes to the making of Blood. Not only is the Kidney responsible for some of the Blood produced, it is also the source of Original Qi which is the basis for Kidney Qi. Original Qi and Kidney Qi help in the transformation of Food Qi to Blood and Blood is needed to nourish Original Qi. Therefore, the relationship between Qi and Blood involves Blood nourishing Qi, Qi generating Blood, Qi moving Blood and Blood being held by Qi.

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