

GEH 1070

Chinese Ideas of
Health Preservation and Ageing

Health Preservation 养生: Body & Mind

- ✓ Chinese tradition of Yang Sheng 养生 is not just about achieving health, but a holistic idea of finding spiritual fulfillment and happiness which are deeply intertwined with attaining a healthy mind and body.
- ✓ TCM teaches that activity is necessary for the conservation of the body while at the same time quiescence is necessary for the cultivation of the mind.
- ✓ For proper balance between activity and quiescence both must be exercised to a moderate degree. Either excess or deficiency of either activity or quiescence can result in harmful effects on the health of the body or the mind.

In TCM the body is the basis of life and consciousness, whereas the mind commands the body's vital activities. Essence, Qi and vitality together constitute the source of life.

Moreover, avoidance of excessive or sustained passions and maintenance of emotional balance are beneficial to the equilibrium between Yin–Yang and Qi-blood.

According to TCM theories Qi and blood need to be active while the mind needs to be quiescent. Only when activity and quiescence are balanced can one achieve the goal of preserving health and avoiding disease.

UNITY OF BODY AND MIND

Unity of Body and Mind

- Quiescence means a mind free of anxiety and a body in relative inactivity. It does not mean a state of stupor. It is crucially important for health preservation, and its cultivation involves certain specific postures, breathing techniques and mental exercises.
- For proper balance between activity and quiescence both must be exercised to a moderate degree. Either excess or deficiency of either activity or quiescence can result in harmful effects on the health of the body or the mind.
- For example, habitually excessive use of the eyes impairs blood; habitually excessive lying about damages qi; habitually excessive sitting injures the muscles; habitually excessive standing weakens the bones; and habitually excessive walking injures the tendons. Therefore, it is necessary for each person to engage in physical activity regularly, but in moderation so as not to cause extreme fatigue, and to use the mind often, but without overtaxing it.

The Mind:

Starting point for Preserving Health

- 1) Chinese culture recognizes seven emotions as the activities of the mind: joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate and desire. The seven emotions are normal activities of the mind, and to a certain extent the bodily functions can regulate them and ensure that they do not become excessive.
- 2) However, for a variety of reasons – individual personality, prolonged immersion in a particular emotion, sudden mental shock or violent emotional change – the emotions may exceed the capacity of bodily control, turn into the passions and become important causes of disease. TCM links the passions to the zang–fu organs and posits that each person’s ability to tolerate emotional changes is directly related to the state of Qi and blood in these organs and to the person’s constitution.
- 3) In the elderly, because of senescent decline of visceral functions the regulation of emotions becomes weaker, as does the capacity to tolerate violent emotional stimuli. In turn, the passions can wear down Qi and blood of the respective visceral organs, thereby accelerating the processes of senescence and even aggravating existing illnesses.

Tranquility of the Mind

- 1) An optimistic outlook can strengthen the harmony of Qi and blood and the dynamic equilibrium of Yin–Yang. Excessive joy or rage can disturb the spirit causing it to become flighty and restless.
- 2) In persons who are elderly or chronically ill, Qi and blood are already in decline and the liver is often inadequately nourished. Such persons especially should promptly reduce strong joy, rage, anxiety or grief by purification.
- 3) The ancient Chinese people often used hills, streams, flowers and trees as aids in the cultivation of character. Thus, standing on a hill overlooking a vast expanse promotes a broader mind, and the different floral fragrances induce different sentiments. The ancients asserted that the flower of the Silk tree (*Albizia*) can calm rage and the flower of the Daylily (*Hemerocallis*) can reduce anxiety.

Harmony with Nature/Seasons

- In regulating the mind it is helpful to do so in harmony with the seasons. The characteristics of the seasons are as follows: **sprouting in spring, growing in summer, harvesting in autumn and storing in winter.**
- In **SPRING**, as Yang-Qi ascends all things on earth begin to overflow with vigor. This is the time to wander in the gardens, tarry in the pavilions or walk in the wilderness in order to relax the mind, keep a pleasant mood and relieve the heart of emotional stagnation.
- In **SUMMER**, as Yang-Qi becomes abundant all things flourish and begin to bear fruits. This is the time to keep a cheerful frame of mind in order to discharge Yang-Qi.
- In **AUTUMN**, Yang-Qi begins to ^{decrease} wane and Yin-Qi begins to wax. This is the time to restrain mental and emotional activities in order to avoid bleakness of the spirit.
- In **WINTER**, Yang-Qi hides and Yin-Qi reaches its zenith. The wind is piercingly cold and all things go into hiding. This is not the time to vent emotions but is the time to conserve the mind and avoid depleting the spirit.



Aging and Longevity

- Aging and longevity has always been a subject of public concern in the Chinese Society.
- Longevity is considered a wonderful gift of human fortune. There should be no surprise therefore, that the practice of healthy survival starts long before what we currently realize as “elderly” or “geriatric” age.

Cultivating Life and Ageing

- 1) In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), old-age ailments are mainly caused by failure to adjust to the four seasons and bodily exhaustion due to over-indulgence in desire, which eventually leads to “blockage and stagnation of Qi (vital energy) and blood” and the decline of physical function.
- 2) Hence in many materials on health cultivation in TCM classics, abiding by the variations of the four seasons and the five elements, adjusting one's *yin* and *yang*, watching one's diet, going for massage and exercising, having adequate rest and leading a disciplined lifestyle, etc., are regarded as the prerequisites of physical fitness and longevity.

Understanding Ageing

- 1) Ageing is a normal physiological process. It cannot be eliminated; it could only be slowed down.
- 2) Chinese Medicine takes a philosophical view on health that is considered a harmonious balanced state of physiological functions.
- 3) Maintaining this balance is an effective way of preventing diseases. The balance is favorably maintained through a careful choice of dietary components and a smart practice of exercises which go beyond the usual concept of training muscles and physical abilities.

Ageing in Chinese Medical Knowledge

- 1) Oriental societies have a long history of promoting health through the prevention of diseases, which are not short of special terms and connotations.
- 2) In TCM, “treating diseases before their onset” does not refer to what we understand by the Public Health Standards of disease prevention, but points to a more personalized pursuit of good health before an individual is disease-struck.
- 3) Under this category of health practice, living and eating habits, lifestyles and special supplements, are all considered.

Ageing in Chinese Medical Knowledge

- 1) The main idea is the prevention of falling sick, which is considered the backbone of Chinese medical practice.
- 2) Herbs used in TCM, indeed, are categorized into three levels: the superior level herbs are used for prevention; the middle level are for early intervention; while the inferior level are for the actual treatment. 上医治未病， 中医治欲病， 下医治已病
- 3) The philosophy in clinical practice is guided by a broader philosophy of harmonization within the individual and harmonization of the individual with the outside world and with Qi. Good health in the Chinese philosophical context, is a state of holistic equilibrium in the physiological and physical activities.

Concept of Herbal Intake to Support Ageing



- a) Longevity is a very much adored blessing. The well-known stories about how the Qin Emperor sent explorers outward from the “Middle Kingdom” in search for longevity herbs.
- b) Maintenance of health to reach longevity must be one of the most frequently pursued health practices that started ever since the beginning of human history.
- c) Folk practice may have components of superstitious practices, which are finding difficulties to gain support in the scientific world. Herbal remedies on the other hand, are simple and straightforward, often giving gustatory pleasure on consumption, therefore maintaining its perpetuating popularity in Chinese communities.

Use of Chinese Herbs for Prevention of Ageing-Related Disease

- a) Herbs that have been observed to be suitable for keeping a holistic balance have been chosen as agents for disease prevention.
- b) These items are commonly used as vegetables in daily meals, either as a main dish or as components or ingredients.
- c) Examples are given in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3. Nutritional items favored in Chinese medicine.

人參	<i>Radix Ginseng</i>
黨參	<i>Radix Codonopsis</i>
黃芪	<i>Radix Astragali</i>
山藥	<i>Rhizoma Dioscoreae</i>
山楂	<i>Fructus Crataegi</i>
山柰	<i>Rhizoma Kaempferiae</i>
枸杞子	<i>Fructus Lycii</i>
沙參	<i>Adenophora stricta</i> Miq.
玉竹	<i>Rhizoma Polygonati Odorati</i>
百合	<i>Bulbus Lilii</i>
薏苡仁	<i>Semen Coicis</i>
蓮子	<i>Semen Nelumbinis</i>
黑芝麻	<i>Semen Sesami Nigrum</i>
冬蟲夏草	<i>Cordyceps</i>

Use of Chinese Herbs for Prevention of Ageing-Related Disease

- a) Some items within the same group of herbs have been used under more obvious pathological situations, either singly or in combination with other herbs.
- b) Examples are given in Table 1.4.

Table 1.4. Anti-aging herbal items favored in Chinese medicine.

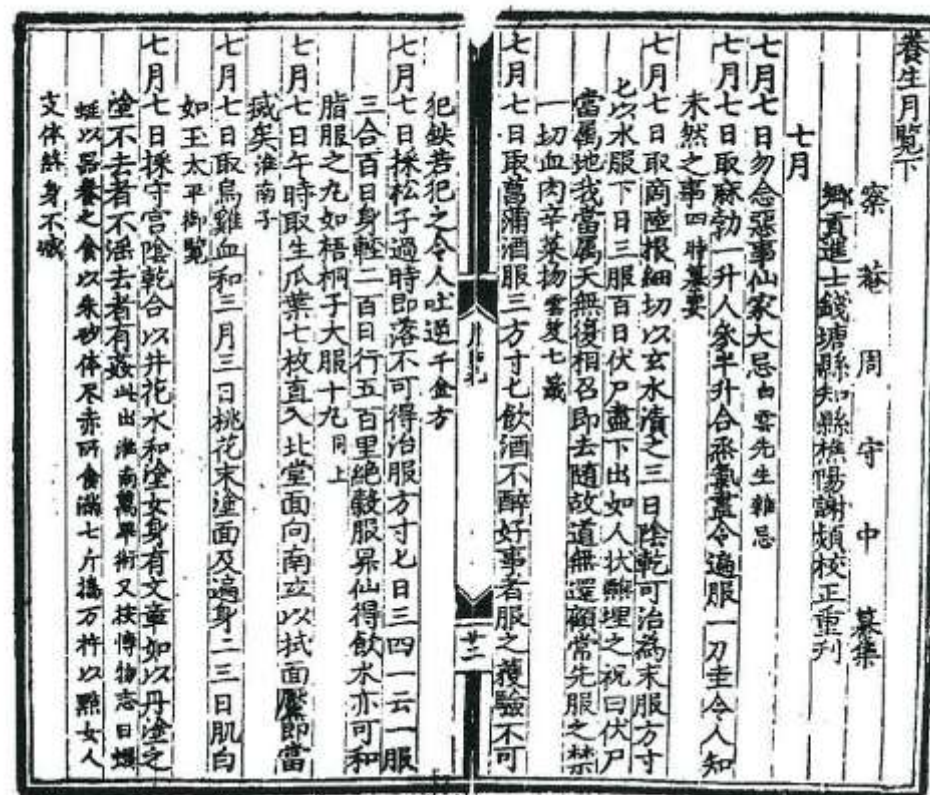
General (those used in food):	人參	<i>Radix Ginseng</i>
	黨參	<i>Radix Codonopsis</i>
	山藥	<i>Rhizoma Dioscoreae</i>
	蓮子	<i>Semen Nelumbinis</i>
	玉竹	<i>Rhizoma Polygonati Odorati</i>
	百合	<i>Bulbus Lili</i>
	薏苡仁	<i>Semen Coicis</i>
	黑芝麻	<i>Semen Sesami Nigrum</i>
Supplementing hemopoiesis:	當歸	<i>Angelica sinensis</i>
	何首烏	<i>Radix Polygoni Multiflori</i>
	枸杞子	<i>Fructus Lycii</i>
	四君子湯	<i>Sijunzitang</i>

Function of Herbs Used for Longevity and Ageing Diseases

- 1) What are the clinical basis behind these herbs when they are used as preventive or treatment items?
- 2) Do the items carry specific therapeutic effects? Or are they just used as “harmonizing” agents?
- 3) The two most likely areas on which herbs may work to maintain health and prevention of ageing-related diseases are **immunomodulation and inflammation control**. The former is related to self-defense and inflammation is the culprit of cellular and tissue degeneration. In the past years, herbal items have been identified to be supportive of immunological defense.

Monthly Handbook for Health Preservation 《養生月覽》

1. One important aspect of health care is to plan one's daily diet according to the prevailing season and to choose the right foods that are in harmony with one's organs, in order to enhance one's health.
2. During the Southern Song Dynasty, a TCM physician Zhou Shouzhong produced a two-volume TCM classic entitled “*Yangsheng Yuelan*” or “Monthly Handbook for Health Preservation”.
3. Dividing his book into 12 monthly sections, he used each section to talk about health care matters unique to that particular month, and came up with a total of 497 healthcare tips.



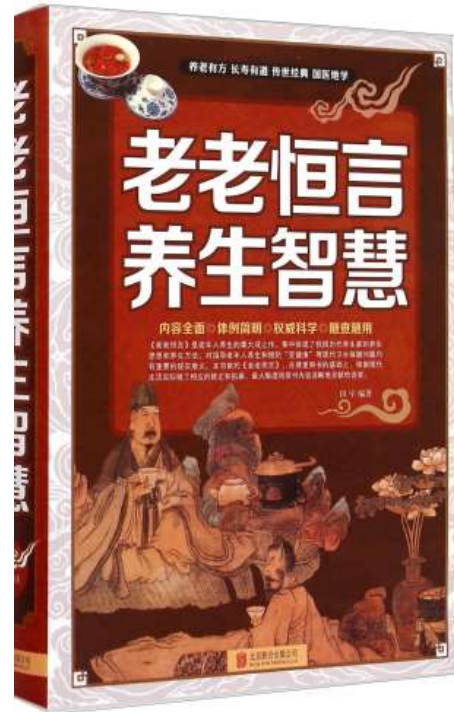
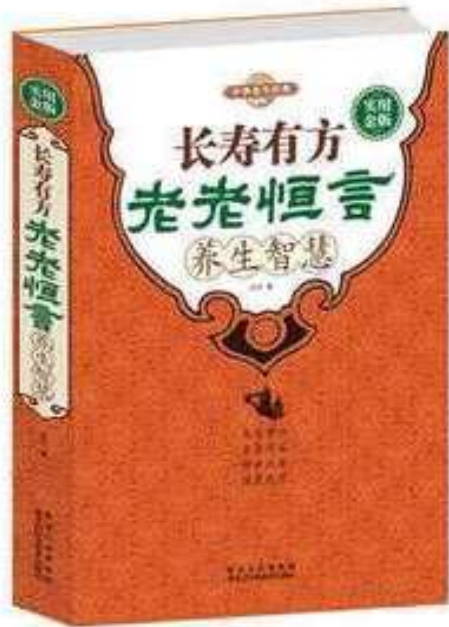
Yangsheng Yuelan 养生月览

(Monthly Handbook for Health Preservation)

- During the different seasons of the year, especially when the *qi* within one's body is still inadequate, one should choose foods that match the particular season, so as to enhance the *qi* within one's internal organs.
- For example, the author suggested eating bamboo leaves porridge during summer to cool one's body and reduce "heatiness", eating mutton during winter as well as eating tonic food to boost one's health.
- Topics covered include hygiene in the home, how to prevent plagues, TCM medication and medicine baths for health cultivation and disease prevention, what kinds of food to eat and avoid during the various seasons and various healthcare tips etc.

Lao Lao Heng Yan 《老老恒言》

(Lasting Advice on Growing Old)



1. The Qing Dynasty classic "Lao Lao Heng Yan" (Lasting Advice on Growing Old) is one of a few extant classics dedicated specifically on the topic of elderly healthcare.
2. The author Cao Tingdong (1699-1785) was a Qing Dynasty scholar. The well-known Chinese writer Zhou Zuoren is full of praise for the book, and once said it will make a marvelous birthday gift for a person celebrating his 60th birthday.
3. When Cao Tingdong was young, he was physically weak and often fell sick, so he began to pay a lot of attention to the healthcare. He wrote this book when he was 75 years old, and listed down his healthcare tips and secrets.

Lao Lao Heng Yan 《老老恒言》

(Lasting Advice on Growing Old)

- 1) Its teachings about healthcare is mainly reflected in theories like : "The value of cultivating one's heart", "how to relax and past your time", "being careful with regards one's diet and daily living", "conforming to nature", etc.
- 2) According to the book: "Sitting down for a long time might causes one's meridian points to be clogged up. If you have nothing to do, even though you are in the house, you should always keep moving around slowly, so that the blood flow in the tendons can circulate smoothly.
- 3) The “Lao Lao Heng Yan” emphasizes the importance of doing daily exercises like walking. “When you increase the number of steps that you do for your exercise, your tendons will be relaxed, and your limbs will be healthy. Walking for several hundred steps after a meal can help one to disperse the Qi in one's body and direct them into our spleens, and this is good for digestion.”

Hu Wenhuan

Baosheng Xinjian 《保生心鉴》

- 1) The TCM classic book “Baosheng Xinjian” (Heart Mirror for Preserving Life) comes with numerous illustrations on the various types of exercises to restore physical health and for the treatment of certain diseases.
- 2) For e.g., it suggests that “sitting in a lotus position, use your hands to cover your ears, and lean the body in both the left and right directions with an angle of 35 degrees. Bite your teeth and swallow your saliva.” The book believes that such exercises can help to treat “water-retention in the ribs, waist and the abdomen area, as well as swelling and pain of the knees” and other types of rheumatism-related ailments.





Hu Wenhuan

Baosheng Xinjian 《保生心鉴》

- 1) As for swelling and pain in the meridian, elbow and other areas of the body brought about by rheumatism, the book illustrates another exercise that can be used to treat and alleviate the pain.
- 2) “Hold your breath and shut your eyes, hold both hands together and turn it over in the opposite direction, lock the knees using your hands, bending both knees in an angle of five to seven degrees, grind your teeth, breath, and then swallow your saliva. ”

Hu Wenhuan

Baosheng Xinjian 《保生心鑑》



- 1) “Everyday between 11pm to 3am , stack your hands together and press down on your legs (as you sit in a lotus position), turn your neck towards the back in both the left and right directions (each in an angle of three or five degrees), grind your teeth, breath, and then swallow your saliva.
- 2) This exercise can help “alleviate neck pain as well as pain behind the ears, shoulders, forelimbs, back as well as elbows etc.”

The ‘Sitting exercise at the start of the spring and the first month
the *Sancái tuhui*

Conclusion: Chinese Ideas of Health Preservation

- 1) Chinese medicine started as philosophical concerns related to health.
- 2) It relies on the maintenance of an internal physiological balance which is essential for the stability of vital activities and is the best means of preventing deterioration.
- 3) While ageing with deteriorating health and degeneration of tissues and organs seem inevitable, the Chinese way of keeping the physiological balance through careful eating, controlled lifestyles and self-maintained exercises appears to be the most comprehensive and economic way of attaining longevity to be recommended.