

The yin and yang of food



The yin and yang of food

The Chinese concept of Yin and Yang is about maintaining the balance of energy. It applies to all spheres of life, including food.

Food is the second most important way in which energy is taken into the body. It's the energy in food that sustains us, and the effect of food energy on our body is the basis for the dietary practice known as macrobiotics. Let's look at how this concept of Yin and Yang applies to our daily food intake...

The Yin

Energy exists on a continuum, from Yin, among whose attributes are the cold, darkness, and contraction. The Yin foods are primarily sweeteners, oil, liquids, and most dairy products, like milk, yogurt, paneer and tofu. These have a cooling effect on us, almost making us lethargic. This effect occurs regardless of their temperature. It is said to be compounded when they're chilled.

Effects of overconsumption

Overconsumption of these foods disperses internal energy and is a primary cause of the weakness and degenerative diseases now prevalent. Caffeine, alcohol, also make an appearance in this category. Although some of these produce an initial burst of energy, their effect quickly abates and is followed by a letdown.

The Yang

Yang is characterized by heat, light, and expansion. The Yang foods are primarily meat, salt, eggs, and hard cheeses, these are said to have a heating and animating effect on the body; overconsumption results in tension and rigidity. Ingredients and preparation are suited to the season and locale, with an emphasis on variety. The five elements are also taken into consideration, as manifested in the five tastes: Sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and pungent.

The perfect balance

A diet based on the principle of balance is mainly grain-centered rather than meat-centered and includes vegetables, beans and bean products, soups and condiments, and in some cases fish and desserts. Foods that are packaged, processed, or chemically treated are avoided, as are most animal products. Both the Yin and the Yang are extreme ends. It's therefore advisable to subsist more toward the center of the food-energy spectrum.