

Clara Cohen: I used to think I was the healthiest person around. Like seriously, I was managing a fitness club. That's before I became a TCM geek, obviously. I was personal training. I was teaching step aerobics and hip-hop dance classes. My friends were all fitness fanatics as well. We hiked, we mountain biked, ran marathon, did adventure races, triathlon.

We were really obsessed. And now in my late 50s, I'm like, "What was I thinking?" But anyway, this is what you do when you're young. You don't know better. We talked about fitness and nutrition constantly, and I thought I had it all figured out. Oh, boy. With age and time comes wisdom. Let me tell you back then, what was my typical day like? Wake up. Drink a green smoothie. Yeah, I can hear you gasp already. Swim for 45 minutes, have another smoothie, then teach an intense one-hour step class. Personal training client all mornings. Lunch pretty much was a massive, big salad with some kind of protein like tuna or salmon or tofu sometimes, with lots of raw vegetables, and then I would have some multigrain bread.

Then I would do more personal training in the afternoon, snack on nuts, on seeds, on fruit, on yogurt. Then I went for a six-mile run in the evening, and dinner was another really big salad with some kind of protein and some quinoa or rice or pasta. And before bed, I had a protein shake. And on top of it all, listen to this, I drank four liters of cold ice water every single day

Are you still gasping? And here's the thing, even though I over-exercised constantly, I was always cold. Like, freezing. And even though I ate so many raw vegetables every single day, which I thought added fiber, I was permanently bloated, like six-months-pregnant bloated, and I had no idea why.

I just thought, "Well, I'm just the unlucky one," right? Then, of course, I started my five-year TCM doctorate program. Best decision I've ever made, by the way. Well, apart from marrying my husband. And one day during lunch, one of my teachers walked past me, looked at my giant salad full of raw vegetables, and just yelled at me.

Like, he yelled, "You! No more salads!" And he walked off. And I thought, "What's his problem? Why is he yelling at me? I love my salad," right? A few weeks later, the crazy salad guy, this is what I called him because he wasn't one of my teachers, he pointed at me again and said, "You, no more salads."

I was so annoyed. I was like, "What's his problem?" Well, wouldn't you know it, a year later, crazy salad guy taught our food cures or Eastern nutrition class, and he gave me my very first TCM aha moment.

Everything I thought I knew about eating healthy, my TCM spleen was paying the price. As you know, cold drinks, raw food all day, huge volume of raw foods, smoothies all year round. I was totally depleting my spleen with every single meal. That's why I was bloated and constantly cold. My spleen was saying, "What are you doing to me?"

And it's funny now because when I'm in a classroom teaching students that are new to TCM and I see some woman drinking smoothies in the morning while listening to me, and she's got a big sweater and she looks frozen, I'm like, "Yep, we're gonna change the way you have breakfast."

but back then I listened to Crazy Salad Guy. I changed everything. I ate cooked food, drank room temperature water, kept smoothies only for really hot summer days, and I always added ginger or some kind of warm spice. My bloating disappeared. I stopped being cold all the time.

It was such a total game changer. That just really empowered me to teach and educate friends, family, everyone I saw, and explain and share my story. And this is why I'm so passionate about specifically TCM spleen nutrition, because I lived it

I was the patient. So today I'm diving into TCM nutrition focusing on the spleen, the organ that governs digestion, that produces energy for our muscle for exercising, but also transform food into qi and blood. And we know blood is the material basis of the mind, which means that also the spleen sends clear qi, clear yang to the head for focus, studying, concentration, and being able to use your mental health in its best capacity.

So I'm gonna look at symptoms and food recommendation for the four most common TCM spleen patterns: spleen qi deficiency, spleen qi sinking, spleen yang deficiency, and dampness invading the spleen. So each pattern is gonna give us a really clear picture of how what we eat every day either supports or depletes this hardworking organ.

And obviously the spleen and the stomach work together in the digestive system. But as we know, the spleen is such a powerful organ, or I should say meridian-organ energy, because it is so impactful on everything because after all, digestion is at the center of our health. It impacts our entire health. Plus, I have another story to share, one from my very first year in clinic that completely changed how I showed up as a practitioner. You're going to love this. Let's go

welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host, Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture because after all, acupuncture rocks

in TCM, the spleen is at the center of everything. As I said earlier, zhong qi, Z-H-O-N-G, is the middle qi, which means it's in the center of our health, and it's also in the center of our body, so digestion is so key to our entire health.

It is also the root of postnatal qi, meaning after we are born, our spleen is responsible for transforming the food and liquids we take into usable energy.

Without a healthy spleen and stomach, nothing will work well, right? Digestion suffers, energy tanks, the mind gets foggy, and the body starts accumulating dampness. And we know dampness is hard to get rid of, so if we can avoid to accumulate it, it's a good day. The spleen, of course, is associated with the earth element in the five element, which means it's associated with transitional seasons, those in-between weeks at the end of each season where everything is shifting.

This is why spleen patterns often flare up in those in-between period when the weather is damp, cloudy, and heavy, right? That makes sense. Now, in Vancouver, we have a lot of rain, so we get a lot of damp. So it's even more important in area where there's damp heat or a lot of damp weather or heavy humid weather to support the spleen.

Now, before we get into the patterns, there are four principles that apply to everyone when it comes to TCM nutrition. First, always eat foods that are in season. This aligns your diet with the natural rhythm around you and supports your spleen by reducing the effort it takes to process the food.

That's why the spleen likes food that is easy to digest. When we transition, we want everything to be easy because transition is a change which makes it hard on the body. Second, we wanna try to eat local because local food is fresher and more in harmony with our environment, obviously, which is especially important for the spleen that already has to work hard.

The third is practicing mindful eating, chewing our food well. We wanna sit down, slow down. The spleen absolutely hates eating at a desk while stressed or scrolling, right? We wanna be mindful, take the time, which not many people do anymore. So that will create qi stagnation, it will create middle jiao dampness, it will create some digestive issue if we just sit and not be mindful.

And fourth, consider your genetic background. Someone whose ancestors ate warm cooked food for generation will often struggle more with raw, cold diet than someone whose genetic background includes maybe more raw food. We are not all the same, and the spleen will tell you exactly how it feels about your choices.

Ad: Diagnosis has to be the hardest part of Chinese medicine. We always say there is no wrong treatment in TCM, only the wrong diagnosis. This is why I created my second book, Chinese Medicine Made Easy, to make it easy to grasp using a lot of colorful visuals. I have included all Chinese medicine foundation, yin yang theory, five element, zang-fu organ, all of it.

All diagnosis, of course, including tongue and pulse, practice case studies to help you improve your skills, as well as give you access to my online fillable intake form to use with your own patients. You can download the digital version on any device, and it comes with many video links to complement it.

Or if like me, you like to read a real book, the hard copy ships all over the world. Before you invest in this book, you can download a sample of it to make sure that the format of the book is everything you were looking for, because I wanna make sure that you are absolutely benefiting from it. Listen to what people have to say about my green book, Chinese Medicine Made Easy.

"The more I read, the more I like this book. It is simple to follow. All information is super organized with great pictures, makes memorizing a lot easier. This book will definitely make my learning a lot more productive." Yay, so happy to hear that. "You've done it again. You are amazing. I wish we had your resources 20 years ago back in TCM school."

This also makes my day because this is why I do what I've been doing with AcuPro Academy for quite a few years now to support everyone. Check out the links in the show notes below, or go to my website, acuproacademy.com and click the shop tab on the menu bar and get your copy today.

Clara Cohen: Let's get into the patterns. Let's start with, of course, the most common one we see in practice, except for liver qi stagnation, which often leads to this one, which is spleen qi deficiency.

This is the most common one, right? Honestly, a huge portion of our patients will have some level of spleen qi deficiency, either because they worry too much, they overthink, they overwork mentally, or they don't have a really nutritious diet.

So the main symptoms are fatigue, especially after meals, loose stools, weakness in the limbs, poor appetite, bloating easily, specifically after meals, maybe food sensitivities as well, worry, overthinking. And the tongue is usually pale with teeth marks. The pulse is weak and maybe slippery if there is dampness, which can occur when there's spleen qi deficiency. When it comes to spleen qi deficiency, we need warm, cooked, and easy-to-digest food. Think of it this way: give the spleen a break. Stop making it work so hard. The less effort it takes to break down the food, the more energy the spleen can use to actually build qi. I always tell patients think baby food, not literally baby food, but in term of texture and digestibility, right? Something very soft.

Great food for spleen qi deficiency includes sweet potato, yam, pumpkins, butternut squash. You could see its very orange-yellow color, which obviously is associated with the earth element or spleen and stomach organ in the five element theory. Carrots, peas, ginger, cinnamon, warm spices are going to keep the middle jiao really happy, right?

Avoid cold drinks, of course, ice, raw vegetables, excessive fruit, specifically if the fruit was kept in the fridge, and large meals as well 'cause it makes it harder on the spleen to transform and transport. When we design a meal plan for a patient with spleen qi deficiency, we wanna give, like, warm oatmeal with cinnamon, a little bit of maple syrup, and maybe a pear, cooked pear in the oatmeal.

That would be very, very delicious and warm. We could have slow-cooked sweet potatoes with chicken and some steamed peas on the side. We could have a baked yam with almond butter. Have you ever had baked yam and put some almond butter over it? Oh my God, it's so good, and sometimes you can add up a bit of cinnamon.

It is so delicious as a snack. I love it. And we could have, let's say a stew with carrots and turnips and squash with brown rice and steamed salmon, 'cause

salmon is very easy to digest because it flakes, right? You don't have to chew a lot, so think of that.

Eggs are really good too as well because they're very soft. Does that make sense? So anything that we don't have to chew a lot that is more soft like baby food is gonna help the spleen qi deficiency. And of course, we wanna make sure that we avoid eating at a desk And we wanna always remind patients try not to overeat.

Speaking of the spleen and since the spleen in TCM is connected to the emotion of worry, I want to share something personal that changed my whole approach as a practitioner. I am without question, if you've been around me, you know I'm a very sensitive person. I'm a spleen empath. I feel everything physically, the light, the sound, people's feeling.

And when I first started clinic during TCM school, this empath and empathetic kind of personality kind of almost broke me. I had a patient in my very first day, and this was observation, so I was just there to observe with a group of students and my teacher.

This patient had colitis for over 20 years with severe diarrhea. She had to quit her job as a teacher, and even when her husband and her drove to the clinic, she had to map out all the public bathrooms she could stop at on the way to the clinic, and she was only 25 minutes away by car.

But just in case she needed to go to the bathroom, because when there was urgency, she couldn't hold it. So it was very, very hard on her, and she cried when she shared her story. That night after clinic when I went home, I cried, too. I cried because I felt so deeply for what she went through, what she was still going through, and how nothing was getting better.

This literally is going to destroy me, I thought. I cannot handle seeing people suffer like this. How am I gonna be a practitioner? This is not the right path for me. This is not the right career for me. I made a mistake. The next day I went to talk to my teacher.

I told her I thought I had made a mistake choosing this career. I thought I was too sensitive to be a practitioner, And she said something I will never forget. She said, "Clara, you are focusing on the problem. Focus on the solution. Focus on how you can help this patient's life get better."

That changed everything for me because it is okay to care deeply. A lot of us go into this profession because we care, because we wanna make a change, because we wanna help people. And I think being an empath is a gift, of course. But our job is definitely not to carry the weight of what our patients are going through.

Our job is to try to figure out a way to focus on what we can do, what change we can make so that patient can get better, right? You know I'm all about changing the world one patient at a time. And that colitis patient got better. Slowly, she got better. She changed her whole diet. The teacher told her what to eat.

And I have carried that teacher's word with me every single day since because I've heard really sad stories from some of my patients, and I'm sure you have, too. Some stories are heartbreaking, what people go through. And we have to have the ability to take it but not let it in. We have to have some kind of protective shield Which means your lung have to be strong in TCM because that's the wei qi, the defensive qi.

It also allows you to not let the emotional, burden that those people are carrying get into you. So we have an ability to help people with our knowledge, but it's not easy when you're an empath. So if you are an empath, you know what I mean, right? So I wanted to share that story because I just want you to know that all you have to do is focus on the solution and what you can do to help, and that redirecting that emotional burden is so useful in practice, and it makes it so much easier to be able to help patients instead of wanting to cry and, you know, really get exhausted and feel like you can't do this, right?

That's why I don't watch the news, because I will carry that news, if it's terrible, for years. I will remember those stories. I just can't watch the news. It just takes me down way too quickly

Sorry for the sidebar. Let's go back to the spleen.

The next pattern, this is very common, is spleen qi sinking, which is essentially the next stage after spleen qi deficiency for years and years and years when the qi is so depleted, it cannot hold things up because the spleen is in charge of holding all the organs up, right?

It's really in charge of going up. When it goes down, it is going the wrong direction, and that means it's weak. So symptoms include, of course, fatigue, loose stool, poor appetite, so the same as spleen qi deficiency, but now we have

prolapse, organ prolapse, hemorrhoids, rectum prolapse, uterine prolapse, and a heavy heaviness feeling or a bearing down sensation in the low abdomen.

We can also have chronic fatigue syndrome. That's a spleen qi sinking where we can't even barely get out of bed. So that is a mental and physical fatigue, lots of worry, lot of overwhelm. The person feels like they just cannot hold it all together because energetically they actually can't. The tongue tends to be pale as well, maybe with some teeth mark.

The pulse is still weak, maybe even weaker, and it might be sinking, like really deep. The best food for spleen qi sinking is to nourish and lift. So we still want warm food, cooked food, of course, easy to digest. Same idea, but now we want something to lift, so bone broth is great. Soups are great to lift, specifically if we can add up herbs or plant like astragalus.

Astragalus is a great herb in Chinese medicine, Huang Qi, to lift. So we can add this to soup. It's very nourishing and lifting. Dates, cherries, fish, mackerel, halibut, onion, garlic, all great to help lift that energy. And again, small meals well chewed are the key. So when we design a meal for a spleen qi sinking, and I have to say acupuncture is fantastic when there's spleen qi sinking, and we have formulas too that are very, very good if we combine them with acupuncture, but diet is also the key.

So having a bone broth with some carrots and vegetables and some chicken, that would be perfect. Or baked halibut with steamed vegetables, and on the side you can have dates and walnuts as a snack, or dates and almond butter. That is also a really good snack. We can have garlic, onion, and lots of vegetable with lentil and make a soup. So you could see a lot of broth and soup are gonna be very useful.

By the way, if you wanna go deeper with TCM food therapy, I also have my TCM nutrition bundle, which has two beautifully designed PDF guides that cover everything you need to confidently use food as medicine in clinic, in class, or at home.

The guides are focusing on the seven most common TCM pattern you see every week, like spleen qi deficiency, blood deficiency, yin deficiency, with healing foods, food to avoid, and recipes.

And I have included all five elements and their organs, season, emotion, and the 19 most common patterns so your patients can eat in harmony with nature year-round. Together they cover the full picture of TCM food therapy, And honestly,

they are the visual references I wish I had when crazy salad guy was yelling at me. I created those two guides to make your life easier and in turn for you to be able to help your patients when it comes to food. The link is in the show notes below.

Okay. Next pattern is spleen yang deficiency, which is basically spleen qi deficiency getting worse with more cold, which depletes the yang, right?

So the digestive fire is low and the body cannot generate enough heat to transform food properly, so the symptoms are gonna be spleen qi deficiency symptoms, but worse, 'cause now the person is cold. Cold body, cold limbs, cold hand, cold feet, and they are looking for warm food. They hate the cold. The loose stool is now almost diarrhea with undigested food in the stool.

The tongue is pale, swollen with teeth mark and a wet coat. The emotion is a deeper overthinking, a deeper worry with overthinking, overanalyzing.

Basically the person's going around and around in their head without being able to land anywhere. They feel overwhelmed. The pulse is deep, slow, and weak. That's a typical yang deficiency pulse. So for this person, of course, we cannot do anything that's raw. No smoothie, no cold food, no cold salad.

Everything should be cooked, ideally warming in nature as well. So we don't wanna do tofu or tomatoes or spinach, even if they're cooked, because they are not going to be warm enough. We want to add up a lot of spices like ginger, nutmeg, leek, fennel, right? Onion, garlic, molasses. This is really nourishing to the spleen yang.

So you can have, if you do congee, congee with ginger and a soft-boiled egg for breakfast, great. Or having a warm fennel and leek soup with spelt bread and salmon. You could have also maybe black bean slow-cooked with ginger, garlic, that would be really good, and some salmon. Molasses-sweetened oatmeal with a cooked pear and some cinnamon and nutmeg over it.

Yummy. So no raw food at all for this person, right? All food should be at least warm or at room temperature. Same for drinks. Ginger tea is excellent throughout the day. Of course, it's very drying, so it's very useful, but we have to not overdo anything, right? It's all about balance always.

AdP Before we continue with today's episode, I wanna share something that honestly feels like a big moment for me. If you've been following me for a while, you know I've always said no to all sponsorships. I've been approached

many times, but I turn them all down because if I don't genuinely use a product or love it, I will never recommend it to you.

But today is different. I am super excited to introduce my very first sponsor, drum roll, please, Jane App. I'm also a Jane ambassador, so this is a company I actually use and love. I am saying yes because I've used Jane for years in my own multidisciplinary clinic. Truly, it's the best practice management software and electronic medical record I've ever worked with.

Before Jane, we were using a clunky system that made everything harder than it needed to be. When we switched, the entire clinic felt the difference immediately. Jane is built by people who actually understand what it's like to be a practitioner running a busy practice. One of my favorite features is online booking.

There is nothing better than waking up and seeing patients booking their own appointment while I was asleep. Your patients can book when it works for them, and the wait list feature fills last-minute cancellations automatically. I love that. I used to spend so much time calling eight to 10 people just to fill up one spot.

Jane also automates the things we never enjoy doing, like intake forms, reminders, confirmation. It honestly feels like having an extra assistant handling all the moving parts so you can focus on what really matters, which is supporting your patients and being the TCM rockstar practitioner you truly are.

There are so many features I could talk about, but we would be here all day. If you're looking for a system that brings more ease, more clarity, and calm into your practice, I truly recommend Jane. You can check it out at jane.app/demo. And because you're part of the AcuPro community, you can use my code AcuPro1MO, one month, when you sign up to get a one-month grace period on your new account.

The link and the code are also in the show notes below for you. Now let's get back to today's episode.

Clara Cohen: The last one, but not least common pattern is dampness invading the spleen. So this is the chicken and the egg. Sometimes spleen qi deficiency creates dampness, but sometimes dampness will weaken the spleen and create spleen qi deficiency.

Sometimes we don't know which one came first, right? So the symptoms are gonna make total sense to you, which is basically it's gonna be heavy, sticky, lots more dampness, foggy head. We feel sluggish, heavy legs, maybe some edema or swelling, bloating of course, maybe joint pain that is worse when there's damp weather, sticky stools, which means we need a lot of toilet paper to clean, maybe some nausea, very fatigued, yeast infection or tendency to have them.

The person might wake up feeling like they did not sleep at all because they feel foggy and heavy and they can barely get out of bed. The tongue is usually swollen with a thick, greasy coat, and of course the pulse is slippery. It could be also weak if there's also some spleen qi deficiency. So the person of course still worries, overthink, but they feel stuck.

They feel like they're just going around and around without resolution, without being able to move forward. So the root cause often is diet, like too much greasy food or eating late at night or overeating in general. Or it could be obviously being in a damp environment.

The spleen gets overwhelmed, cannot transform fluid properly, and then dampness shows up, right? So we need food that is warm but also drying, . Like rye, amaranth, corn, celery, lettuce, scallion, pumpkin, chamomile, adzuki beans are especially well known in TCM for draining dampness, so it's really good. Asparagus is also good, but it needs to be cooked because that's cooling. So we wanna make sure that we have food that is going to be dry but warm.

So example, we can have a soup with adzuki bean, celery and scallion and some corn in it. We can have pumpkin and turnip stew with amaranth on the side or rye toast. We can have rye toast with almond butter, for example, and a cup of chamomile tea, if you like chamomile tea. I don't like chamomile, so other drying herbal tea or rose hip. Rose hip is really drying. And of course ginger would be really drying as well, so we can do that.

And of course for this person we wanna tell them to avoid as much as possible sweet or sugary food and dairy food because it creates more dampness.

Well, it's been my pleasure to guide you through the TCM approach to spleen health and food, and I hope that if nothing else, you walk away with this episode with one thought: Food is medicine.

Let's never forget that. Every meal your patient eat is either supporting their TCM spleen or asking it to work harder than it should, which means it will

deplete it, right? The choices really do add up, and as practitioners and students, we are in a unique position to help people understand that. Crazy salad guy changed my life, and I hope that this episode really truly benefits you. Remember, your TCM journey, whether you're a practitioner or a student, does not have to be walked alone. This is why I'm here, and if you go to acuproacademy.com, I have tons of resources, online courses, free PDFs, so many great resources you can benefit from.

And I have over, at this time, 650 videos on my YouTube channel with playlists you can binge on like it's Netflix for the TCM geek in you. The link is right in the show notes below.

And if you're ready to have a complete visual reference for TCM food therapy on your desk, one you will actually reach for every single week, check out my TCM nutrition bundle in the show notes below. Those two guides with the full patterns, the five-element coverage, beautiful visual, is everything in one place that you need for a great reference when it comes to TCM nutrition.

If you found value in today's episode, please follow The AcuPro Show on your favorite podcast platform and share this episode with someone that you think could benefit,

someone that may be drinking lots of green smoothies, they might benefit from this episode. Your support means the world to me, and together we keep spreading the knowledge that changes lives using Chinese medicine.

Until next time, keep rocking it using TCM nutrition, acupuncture, all the tools in your toolbox, because after all, Chinese medicine rocks.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. I truly hope you benefited from this episode, and I would love for you to share it with a friend that may benefit from it as well. Follow the show, leave a review, and if you want more, go to my website, acuproacademy.com. I have tons of resources there with treatment protocols, case studies, free courses, and so much more.

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