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Food therapy and medical diet therapy of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Food therapy of traditional Chinese medicine aims to maintain balanced nutrition through diet. Medical diet therapy, however, is to achieve the balance of Yin and Yang through the combination of nutrition and medicine. Either “food therapy” or “medical diet therapy” aims to keep health, prevent disease, remove illness and slow aging. In recent years, both food therapy and medical diet therapy have been increasingly applied in clinical nutrition therapy. In terms of traditional Chinese food therapy and medical diet therapy, their clinical applications principles are summarized in this article.

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1. Introduction

Food therapy of traditional medicine aims to maintain balanced nutrition through diet. Medical diet therapy, however, is to achieve the balance of Yin and Yang through the combination of nutrition and medicine. There are both connections and distinctions between them. On the basis of traditional food therapy, medical diet therapy coordinates with drugs and adopts traditional culinary skills and modern processing methods to produce food, which is not only with terrific color, aroma, taste and shape but also health-keeping, disease-resisting and healing as well as longevity-promoting. It treats through eating, that is, medicine can be used as food and food can be combined with medicine. In this way, medicine functions by means of food and food reinforces the effects of medicine. To this extent, medicine and food supplement and bring out the best in each other through combination. Either “food therapy” or “medical diet therapy” aims to keep health, prevent disease, remove illness and slow aging.

Long before, plenty of monographs appeared in masterpieces of Traditional Chinese Medicine, like *Canon of Yellow Emperor*, *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica*, *Invaluable Prescriptions for Ready Reference*, *Principles of Correct Diet*, discussing how diet plays a role in human's physiology, pathology, health maintenance and disease treatment. For example, in *Plain Questions: On Soup and Mash*, it is recorded that grains were boiled into soup, as nourishment to the five internal organs (heart, liver, spleen, lung and kidney) in ancient times. After boiling for some time, grains were fermented and turned into mash, which can be used as treatment to the above five internal organs.

With the rapid growth of people's living standard and working pace, more and more attention and recognition are paid to the adjuvant therapeutic effects of food therapy and medical diet therapy, that is, health maintenance and disease avoidance. In recent years, both food therapy and medical diet therapy have been increasingly applied in clinical nutrition therapy. In terms of traditional Chinese food therapy and medical diet therapy, their clinical applications principles are summarized as follows.

2. Food therapy-“To fully cure disease, eat grains, meat, fruit and vegetables”

Written more than 2000 years ago, *Plain Questions: On Laws and Times of Organs* had already pointed out that grains to nourish, fruit to assist, livestock to benefit, vegetables to supplement, take them in proper proportion to supply energy. The key point is to keep a balanced diet. Besides, it has suggested that when one's illness is already under control, it could be removed gradually by eating grains, meat, fruit and vegetables. There is no more need to take too much medicine, which might cause extreme side effects to our health. The claimed “grains to nourish” refers to using millet, sorghum, beans, wheat, rice and other cereals and beans as staple food for maintaining one's life. “Fruit to assist” means that Li, apricot, chestnut, peach and other fruits and nuts are essential food aid to balanced diet. “Livestock to benefit” emphasizes that cattle, dogs, sheep, pigs, chicken and other livestock are beneficial to human body along with making up the deficiency of nutrition that grains can't provide. They serve as the main complementary food in the balanced diet recipe. “Vegetables to supplement” indicates that vegetables like kwai, leek, allium, scallion, shallot etc. can supplement various essential nutrients.

In other words, grains, meat, vegetables and fruit should be used in proper proportions so as to maintain the normal function of human body. Moreover, following a diet is very necessary and it is not advisable to either starve or overeat. Starvation will cause insufficiency of vital energy and blood and decline of immunity, resulting in diseases, such as malnutrition, anemia. According to *Plain Questions: On Arthralgia*, intestines and stomach would be impaired by overeating, along with symptoms like abdominal fullness and distention, anorexia, excessive gastric acid and vomiting and diarrhea. Therefore, Traditional Chinese Medicine emphasizes that it is necessary for people to keep a regular diet habit and arrange balanced diet according to one's age, gender and constitution. This viewpoint is exactly consistent with the balanced diet proposed by experts of modern nutriology.

Traditional Medicine holds that food has various properties, including warm, hot, cold, cool. Among them, warm and hot share the same property, while cold and cool are of the same nature. Warm and hot food can warm the spleen and stomach for dispelling coldness, invigorate the spleen and reinforce the stomach, and reinforce the kidney-yang, which are suitable for those who are in deficiency of Yang with hyperactivity of Yin and cold constitution, with symptoms appearing like cold limbs and waist, chills, thin sloppy stool and frequent nocturia. Warm food mainly includes glutinous rice, oats, red

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