

In A Bite with Charlotte Mei

Season 2 Episode 2 - Jun Negoro

Full Transcript

Charlotte Mei

Hello, Hello and welcome to another episode of In a Bite. I'm super excited for today's topic because it's something that I've been meaning to speak about since *the day* I started in a bite. Now I find the space of traditional medicine super intriguing, right? It's something that I didn't get to study as a nutritionist. So here I am scratching my own itch. Now, there are many systems of traditional medicines globally, and my hope is to get through each of them, or at least the main ones. As much as I can.

To start off, this episode is on traditional Chinese medicine, which is more commonly referred to as TCM.

Now I know I'm not the only one in this bubble of curiosity, because when I posted on Instagram stories a couple of days ago, crowdsourcing questions on this topic, gosh, you guys came through. There were so many questions. And hang tight because we do answer them in this episode and I hope you find that helpful.

So our guest today is Jun Negoro. She's a TCM practitioner based in Singapore and she is trained in biomedical science and TCM. In her clinical practice she focuses mainly on treating women's health and fertility. And so in this episode we spoke about —when to see a TCM physician versus a western doctor, the relationship between TCM and mental health, what different foods mean to different people. And Jun also shares a really cool assessment tool that you can use to find out *your own* personal body composition. I learned so much in this episode and I hope you enjoy it too!

Charlotte Mei

Hi Jun, welcome to the show. I am so excited to speak to you today.

Jun Negoro

Hi Charlotte I'm Jun. So happy to be here today on your podcast.

Charlotte Mei

Yes, You know, I've been gosh, I've been wanting to talk about this for the longest time, since the day I thought of doing a podcast. But I knew that, y'know, I couldn't do this alone. I had to speak to an expert. So you're the first person that came to mind and the first question I wanted to ask you is to explain to my listeners and I, the main principles of TCM. Because I hear so much about 'chi' or about 'heatiness' and 'coolness'...could you walk us through that?

Jun Negoro

Yes, so this is a very big question but I will try to phrase it very simply, y'know something that's easy to understand for all listeners. So as you know TCM is an ancient philosophy that's been around for more than 2,000 years and a lot has changed since then. But it's very adaptable to our modern world challenges. And I think the core principle of TCM is about interconnectedness and the balance and also uniqueness, that's very relevant today.

So I just want to share a bit more about interconnectedness —it's about how the human body is a microcosm of our surrounding world and universe. So we are really part of nature. And the key principle is the 5 element theory in TCM. So this 5 element theory groups natural phenomena to 5 different groups, so like —wood, fire, earth, metal and water. And each category has like a season, an organ, body tissue, emotion, flavour and taste that's associated with it.

For example like the wood element, that's related to the liver organ and it's related to spring, the colour green, the taste of sourness. And it's also interesting to note that it's related to the anger emotions. So yea, it kinda provides a blueprint to show how the nature interacts with our body. And then it gives us like a framework to understand where the imbalances are in our body and mind.

Charlotte Mei

That's so fascinating. I mean, I have so many questions right now, but first of all, how were all these connections discovered?

Jun Negoro

So this one was through a lot of experiences from physicians from 2000 years ago. Y'know, them working and interacting with nature and also with herbs. They go through a lot of testing with their patients at their time and it's a lot to do with their empirical evidence, do a lot of trial and error.

And also the other concept is about balance —the yin and yang. I think some people are familiar with the yin yang —where yin is more of a dark, soft, cold, passive element. Whereas yang is the opposite —light, hot and active. So 'chi' is more like a yang element. So either yin or yang is in excess, one of them will tend to like consume one another.

So for example if you have like late nights or long term chronic stress this will deplete the yin energy—

Charlotte Mei

Well that's me!

Jun Negoro

And then you will cause yin deficient heat, and that will show up as irritability or maybe a bit of like dry skin, like feverish symptoms.

Charlotte Mei

And how are yin and yang related to, you know, 'heatiness', 'coolness', 'dampness', that sort of thing.

Jun Negoro

So 'heatiness' and 'coldness', I know we hear that a lot in Singapore. It's also to do with the TCM concept of food energetics right? It's a system where it categorises food based on their energetic properties and how it interacts with the body.

So the food energetics split the food into hot, warm, neutral, cooling and also cold. So when we say like 'heatiness' it can be due to an external factor or internal factor. So external things like if you eat like durian this means that the energetic property is 'hot' and it creates warmth in our body but internal heatiness is what we call the body constitution. There's too much yang energy, the heat, the hot energy or you mention like damp heat in the body.

So the symptoms will be like constipation, sweating a lot. And you have a lot of acne on your skin. Bad breath. These are all signs of like 'heatiness'. Yeah. And then yeah—

Charlotte Mei

Oh interesting—

Jun Negoro

And coldness is also the same. It's the opposite. It's always internal or external, and it has different effects on different people. So for me, I'm a very young, deficient, very cold call, hands and feet.

So if I'm eating something that's very hearty, I might not show much symptoms or I might even feel good eating heat food. But if someone is very hearty and you eat hearty food and then that will create excess heat in the body and aggravate the symptoms. Yeah—

Charlotte Mei

—Okay. This whole world of TCM and food, I am so fascinated by it. We're going to go into it in a bit. But going back to 'chi', when you first meet a patient, how do you...do you measure their 'chi'? How do you go about it? yeah. And then, and this is why for some people I do hear them say, I have a weak tea.

Jun Negoro

Yeah. So 'chi' is what we call the vital energy that's present in all living entities, is not just humans like animals, plants they all have their 'chi' in them. 'chi' is produced by our lungs, the spleen and the kidney organ system. And it forms into different kind of 'chi'. So actually, when you say 'chi' there's a lot of different types of 'chi'.

For example, we have what we call the yuan 'chi' which is the prenatal energy that we get from our parents.

You know what you inherit when we are born and then 'zhen chi' is like the 'chi' to fight off fires and external pathogens and like, 'wei chi', is like defence 'chi' that kind of supports our immune system. So in

a very general sense, 'chi' is like what drives us. If you have heard of the meridian energy channels, the 'chi' runs in the in those energy channels, so they provide the active energy for us to do our activities.

It forms and circulates the blood. 'chi' and blood moves together, they're like best friends moving along together. And it supports like the metabolism of fluids and it warms our body as well, defend our body from external pathogens and also holds everything in place. Like holds the blood in place, hold our organ in place so we don't have prolapse.

So 'chi' is really a very big topic, but that's the general understanding of 'chi'. So imagine like a sailboat on the sea, the 'chi' helps to push things along and power things along. So 'chi' is the vital energy that runs in our body to push things, get things going.

Charlotte Mei

And this is why for some people I do hear them say 'Oh I have a weak chi'. So how..how...what can one do to improve their 'chi'?

Jun Negoro

So with 'chi' you can eat according, definitely, to your body type. So when we talked about the constitution, there's one called a 'chi' deficiency constitution. So when 'chi' is very low, you'll feel very tired. I think that's the main symptom that we see. You get tired very easily and you might have like a pale complexion. So to help nourish the 'chi', you definitely want to support your spleen and stomach digestive system, because in TCM, spleen is like the hub, the digestive hub where we eat our food and then it produces 'chi' and blood.

So when you know you always you don't eat cold food and like don't eat too much raw food. The idea is that you want the spleen to be optimal. You want it to digest the food very easily so you can produce enough 'chi' from the food. So things like whole grains, warm cooked food, eating small, frequent meals and spleen is also associated with the colour yellow.

So things like root vegetables, like potatoes, sweet potatoes, oats, grains, it's kind of like pale yellow colour will help to support that 'chi' energy. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

Oh that's so interesting. Wow you remind me of what my mum used to tell me 'Charlotte stop eating so many salads! 'Cause it's raw and it's cold and you have to eat more warm foods...'

And I used to say 'Ok I get it...I mean, I'm eating this because I love it. And it's efficient and super easy to put together. And in my head as a nutritionist, I'm like, 'Why are you telling me that this is not good?'

You know, like, I never understood the connections. So how, I mean, before we go into talking about food, how important is it for someone to know their body constitution?

Jun Negoro

So the body constitution is really like the fundamental concept in TCM, because it lays the foundation for diagnosis as a practitioner, treatment and it tells us whether the illness, disease will progress even further or whether you can prevent the illness. So maybe I just go through what the body constitution is about. So it is a body condition that makes us susceptible to certain illness.

So maybe we can get the same flu, but you might not get sick, but I'll get sick because we have different body constitution. And this body constitution is affected by our inborn and also acquired factors. So inborn meaning, you know, the inherited traits from your parents like genetics, like DNA and then acquired factors is what we call the postnatal epigenetics.

So you can change according to our diet, environmental factors like emotional stress and what kind of lifestyle you lead. And you know, all these mind, body constitution is what we are born with. It doesn't really change and this body constitution can overlap also. So there's mine, one you will be more dominant, but it can overlap with another one.

And I believe it's very important to have awareness of our own body because it's really about understanding yourself and finding what is suited for you, right? So knowing your body type can help with illness prevention and also avoid any unnecessary discomfort in life. Yeah, and it's also important —there's no good or bad constitution. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

Okay, that's very important to know. So just finding out your body constitution and just doing things that will help it, that will support it. And so for people listening today, how can they find out their body constitution? Where do they start?

Jun Negoro

There's a lot of quiz online. I also have a [Kanpobliss quiz app](#) that you can answer your question. It's called the 'Body Check'. So I'll ask a few questions about your lifestyle, what kind of symptoms you have at the moment and also about your period cycles and all that. So that will kind of give you an assessment of what body type you are and then I also provide a bit of nutrition and lifestyle tips that you can do at home.

Charlotte Mei

Oh wonderful! Okay. I'm hopping onto that app right after this interview. And so moving on to food, right, because it plays such a huge role in TCM. Could you walk us through some of the main principles when it comes to food?

Jun Negoro

So when it comes to food —the eating according to body constitution, is very important. So for example you mention that last time you used to eat a lot of salad and I think eating a certain way is healthy. But if it's more important to ask like who is it for? You know, the diet is healthy for who?

So a bowl of grains like with lots of fresh greens, nuts and seeds, definitely sounds very healthy, but it might be too difficult to digest for someone who is young, deficient, you know, like me feeling very cold, tired, or maybe you could easily get loose stools, diarrhoea. Eating salads might not be good for a young deficient person. So this person might benefit more from eating porridge with minced meat, soft cooked spinach with pepper and ginger. This will be a lot more easier for the digestive system to get the nutrients out. Yeah.

So but if someone is more young, excess or in-deficient heat causing a bit of heat...damp heat, then having some salad or eating cooling food like cucumber, watermelon, it's beneficial for them. Yeah. So this is for the body constitution. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

Okay. And and so if someone, let's say I'm young, deficient and I eat a certain type of foods that support this system, do I continue doing it for the rest of my life because I'm forever young, deficient, or do I achieve a certain type of balance and then I change the way that I eat.

Jun Negoro

Yes. So for young deficient, you also want to monitor what kind of symptoms you have. So if you are still feeling very cold then you want to maybe increase your dosage of your warming food or herbs even because sometimes food is not enough. But when you reach a level where you feel comfortable and hearty food is actually causing heat, like they get sore throat or maybe you feel very hot.

Then you can like cut down. But a young deficient person kind of tend to go back to their body constitution easier. So you want to monitor with the symptoms they have. That's why it's very important to have awareness, like to keep your symptoms in check and understand like how your body reacts to the food at different times of your life, different phases of your life. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

So it's always about listening to your body, isn't it? And, you know, wow, I had so many questions about this. So is it you say that eating a hearty food. So, for example, let's eat mangoes. Mangoes are 'hearty', are they?

Jun Negoro

Yes

Charlotte Mei

Okay. So if two people with different body compositions eat mangoes, the 'heatiness' will not necessarily affect them the same way. Correct. Okay. Okay, good. Because I hear a lot of people going around saying 'don't eat this because it's hearty! Don't eat that!' But at the end of the day, like what you said, it really depends on the person who's eating it.

Jun Negoro

Yes definitely

Charlotte Mei

Okay.

Jun Negoro

Yeah. So I think the common one like you know in, in Singapore we have a lot of the Liang Cha, Liang teh —cooling tea. So if two person have the same cough, like a simple cough, western medicine will give you like a anti coughing syrup and all that. But if you are showing symptoms of like yellow thick phlegm, like a very hoarse loud cough, that's a very young heat symptom. So they will benefit from the Liang Teh. But if someone is having a cough with thin watery phlegm or a dry cough, it might be due to cold. So Liang Teh will make it worse. Yeah. So it works with diet, and food and also the herbs that we prescribe.

Charlotte Mei

Okay. Sure. And so going back to food then, is there a directory of the 'heaty' and cooling foods? Because growing up, right,. I mean...and I think this is the issue with my generation and I'm sure you see this in a lot of your patients. You know, we grew up hearing bits and bobs of TCM in terms of the principles. I grew up knowing that if you're coughing, don't eat oranges or mangoes because it's heaty, for example. But I could never grasp the principles behind it. So, you know, is it food cooling because it's cold or because it looks a certain way, tastes a certain way? How do we, you know, look at a food and go, okay, you're in this category.

Jun Negoro

Ahhh yea, we do have a chart for the food energetics. So the food energetics, you know they rank it according to like hot food like; ginger pepper, turmeric. These are very chilli, It's very hot. Warm is like prawn, lamb, beef, these are more warming. And then neutral is mostly the vegetables like root vegetables, they are mostly neutral cooling food like cucumber, watermelon. And some cold things, you know, definitely ice, smoothies, juices.

These are cool. So there's a spectrum of all these food according to the food energetics. And there's there's a list of food according to the category. So these are our food. Yeah. Food energetics in TCM.

Charlotte Mei

So from what you just described, it seems to me because I'm trying to come up with easy systems to remember these different categories, it seems to be that foods with a high water content tend to be cooling?

Jun Negoro

Yes, yes you can say that. Like cucumber, like even green beans, white fungus...y'know the TCM, the white fungus?

Charlotte Mei

Mmmhmm

Jun Negoro

All these are more in nourishing food. And the way you cook it also will change. So that makes it a bit complicated. So let's say a neutral potato. If you deep fry and make it into a French fry, that will turn into more heaty food as opposed to, like, boiled food. Yes. In terms of nutrition.

Charlotte Mei

And so, you know, I'm thinking right now, right in my studies as a nutritionist, it's based on a lot of Western science, I'm trying to look at the differences between Western and TCM principles in terms of nutrition. What are some of the main differences that stand out to you?

Jun Negoro

In terms of nutrition?

Charlotte Mei

Yea

Jun Negoro

I think in terms of nutrition, I think in Western concept they look a lot at the micronutrients, the vitamins in the food itself. But TCM really doesn't look at that.

So it's really about how your body responds to a certain kind of food and the food energetics, definitely plays a big role in that. Yeah, I think that's the main difference.

Before we know about the food energetics, even if you have the list of food, what are you going to eat? You don't know if you don't know your body constitution, right? So they really go hand in hand.

Charlotte Mei

So in Western, I would call it maybe Western slash modern nutrition, we look into, your right, micronutrient deficiencies. What are the macronutrients you have on your plate? Carbs, protein, fats. But in TCM you're looking at the energetic deficiencies. Am I right in saying that?

Jun Negoro

Yes, the energetic properties of the food. Yeah. And of course you know, now that we know all about, you know, the healthy fats and the protein. I do take into account when it comes to having a balanced nutrition. You do have to have carbs, protein and healthy fats in balance. But with that, you know, we kind of look at what like heaty, more warming food, cooling food according to your body type. So there is an overlap when it comes to TCM.

And it's also important like the different flavours that comes with the food in TCM. So there's five different flavours that's associated with the different organ systems. I don't know if you have heard of the flavor concept in TCM?

Charlotte Mei

Okay, yes, I have. I think I am most familiar with 'bitter', but I can't tell you what each of them mean. I mean, could you walk us through that?

Jun Negoro

Yea for sure. So we have the five elements which is wood, earth, metal, fire, water. So the liver is associated with sour taste. Liver to do is start with sour taste. So if you feel that you're very stressed or you feel very angry, which is related to the liver organ, you want to add in a bit of sour food in your diet like lemon or vinegar apple cider or umeboshi —the sour plum.

And then the bitter taste that you mention is associated with the heart organ. The heart. Yeah. So a bit of bitter gourd or bitter lemon, a bit of coffee in moderation will help to kind of drain the heat that agitates the mind, which is related to the heart. I know it sounds a bit complicated, but heart is related to the bitter taste.

Charlotte Mei

I'm literally taking notes right now. Jun, this is so interesting. Okay go on, so liver related to sourness. So basically to say that if you want to support your liver further, you have to eat more sour foods. For the heart, it's bitter.

Jun Negoro

Yes and for the spleen, which is like spleen and some of the digestive hub is sweetness. Like natural sweetness, not like sugar.

Charlotte Mei

Oh okay, yes. By the way it's not any sweets

Jun Negoro

Yes. So, like, sweet potatoes, grains, you know, they are naturally sweet. I think a lot of root vegetables, and it's easy to digest. Yes. And then the lung is spicy, like pungent flavours. Like chilli, white pepper, kind of like aromatics that helps to burst the flavours and bring the 'chi', move the 'chi'. Y'know, those pungent flavours. And then kidney, the last one is associated with salty taste like natural salty taste, like seafood, seaweed, sea salt. These are related to the kidney organ.

Charlotte Mei

Right and do we know the mechanism of how the 'chi' is moved?

So, for example, if someone has issues with digestive health, then they eat more sweet potatoes and more grains. How does the consumption of these foods help with the health of their spleen or digestive organs?

Jun Negoro

So when, for example, the spleen likes dryness and the spleen 'chi' moves upwards, bring the healthy, 'chi' upwards. And the stomach likes to be a bit more moist and the 'chi' goes downwards. So if they are not working properly, you feel maybe indigestion, bloating, nausea, this is all 'chi's' stomach going up. It shouldn't go up. This is why we call it rebellious 'chi', in TCM.

So we want to bring the 'chi' down. Right?

So eating according, y'know like some sweet food, easily digested cooked food in small portions. These will help to calm the symptoms down and then you should be seeing all these symptoms go away as your organ system gets more, function more optimally.

Charlotte Mei

So when you see that the 'chi' is going up and down, I'm trying to visualize something. Could I then say, going back to your previous analogy of the sailboat, could I say that when your 'chi' is, when you 'chi' up, then the sailboats on rougher waters and you want to bring it down? Am I right?

Jun Negoro

Yes something like that

Charlotte Mei

Okay, so where do you want your 'chi' to be? Up or down.

Jun Negoro

Different organs have different direction.

Charlotte Mei

Oh wow!

Jun Negoro

So I'm just giving the example of the spleen and stomach, because I think that, you know, now we are talking about nutrition, digestion. I think bloating, you know, indigestion is something that's very common for a lot of people. Yeah. So you always want to keep the stomach 'chi' going downwards.

Charlotte Mei

This is so interesting. I need this chart. I need the chart for the cooling and heaty foods. I need the chart for the 'chi'. Okay. Reminding myself this is just one episode. I'm not...I'm going to keep it to the basics.

And I just also want to compare TCM to other aspects of modern nutrition —intermittent fasting.

This is something that is very, very common these days. How does TCM look into that as well?

Jun Negoro

Yes, we do have something called the body clock. We eat according to our body clock. So the TCM emphasises the importance of eating in harmony with the body's natural rhythms. So the body clock has, let's say, 24 hours, right? You have 24 hours in a day. It's divided into 12 two hour intervals. So every organ system has 2 hours of peak time where the 'chi' is moving through and they're most active. So, for example, we're talking about spleen and stomach. They are most active and efficient in processing of food around 9 to 11 a.m. That's kind of like when we eat our breakfast usually.

So those with weak stomach and spleen, I wouldn't recommend doing the intermittent fasting for too long. So like a 12 hour, like skipping your breakfast and maybe eating around like nine late, late, late breakfast. I think that will be good. So short answer: Intermittent fasting really depends on the individual. Yeah. For someone who is more doing something that's more labour intensive, they will benefit from eating that.

You know, moms who have just given birth. You will want to eat more nourishing food during that time, 9 to 11 or to help feed the body with the nutrients that they need. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

For sure. And you know, now talking about, you know, moms and pregnancy and stuff like that, this is one of your areas of specialty women's health. How does TCM play a role in this space? I mean, so many people talk about keeping your womb warm and not drinking cold drinks during your period.

Are these I mean, is there science behind that? What is the explanation?

Jun Negoro

So let's start with the cramping during periods, because I think many, many women experience that. It's very normal to experience some kind of discomfort, not pain discomfort during the period, especially the first two or three days, because this is due to the natural chemicals, the prostaglandins that's made in the uterus lining and then this hormone that prostaglandins will cause the muscles and the blood vessels to to contract.

So during the first day of the period, this level of prostaglandins is very high. But as the period carries on, the lining is shed and then the level goes down. So the discomfort also goes down. But it's a problem when the pain is so strong that your idea of bending forwards, taking painkillers, which doesn't really work, or, you know, you're lying down in pain, unable to do your normal activities.

And I know some women, their pain can be so severe. It comes with diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting. These are something that we have to look at. So I think period pain. When it comes to pain in TCM, there's a lot of factors that can cause the pain. So again, we look at the different patterns of disharmony. So period

pain can be caused by blood stagnation, cold in uterus, just like what you mentioned. 'chi' deficiency or kidney deficiency.

So all these, again, are different patterns of disharmony. So one will be more dominant again, just like the constitution, they can overlap also. So the idea is that cold things, cold drinks, cool food will congeal and constrict the blood flow and the 'chi' flow and become stagnant. And in TCM, when something is stuck, something is stagnant, it does not flow properly, —it causes pain. So that's why you have period of pains if you drink too much cold food.

So, but it's not so simple. So again, like 'chi' and blood stagnation —different period pain. They show up as different kinds of pain and when the pain comes. So if it's 'chi' and blood stagnation, the pain is usually very sharp, like a stabbing pain at a fixed spot. And it's usually like before or during the period. And then if you have cold in your uterus, the pain usually feels better with heat or if you like heat packs and all this. This is a sign that is due to cold.

But another one —the chi and the kidney deficiency. The pain is more towards the later part of the period or after your period. And it's not so painful in a way. It's more like a pulling down sensation at your lower abdomen. It's like a nagging kind of pain. It's a bit different from the stagnation kind of pain.

So different patterns you want to eat different things. Again, either you take warming cooked food, or you want a support with a bit more kidney nourishing food like walnuts, black sesame, you know, again, kidney is related to the salty flavours of seaweed, sea salt. So different pattern, different food.

Yes.

And about the cold, cold drinks. The cold drinks. It's not like you drink cold stuff, okay, then your period will be, have less flow. It's not like so immediate. But short answer is yes. Because again, it comes back to the whole spleen and stomach digestive hub. The digestive hub creates 'chi' and blood from food.

So imagine like a pot over a burning fire, right? So the food goes into the pot, which is digested, and then the fire refers to the digestive fire. I think we're kind of all familiar with the digestive fire, it helps to burn and ferment to digest that food. And if the fire's weak or you keep adding ice — your very cold, you know, bubble tea or cold salads. The fire have to work really, really hard. And then over time, this fire becomes smaller, meaning that your spleen digestive hub becomes weaker and it cannot produce enough 'chi' and blood. That's why you get lighter periods. Y'know?. Yeah. Lighter periods can be one of the symptoms or like the coldness will become chilled and then you get like clotty periods. Yeah.

So that's kind of the rationale behind why you should limit raw and cold food, especially if you are young deficient, and especially when you're having a period. Other times it's okay to have a little bit.

Charlotte Mei

Okay, everyone listening to this, you like your cold water? Any time outside of your period is totally fine.

Jun Negoro

Yeah. Yes, a little bit in moderation.

Charlotte Mei

And in moderation, as always. But Jun, I'm also really curious because if we think of our body as a vessel, I mean, our body is pretty efficient at keeping a stable body temperature in good health. So if I'm drinking cold water, the temperature of the water once it enters my body, how I mean, is it really going to affect that digestive fire that much, or is like my internal body temperature able to sort of balance that out?

Jun Negoro

So again it comes down to the constitution, if you're very young deficient and you're already cold, not the temperature cold but the coldness in the body will not be able to tolerate the coldness so much. And but if you are more on the heaty excess showing a lot of heat symptoms when you take in cold food or cold drinks it has the ability to balance back much faster so you might not show any symptoms. So it's more really about the balance...goes back to the balance of yin and yang, hot and cold.

Charlotte Mei

Sure...so where is your body's baseline? Right?

Jun Negoro

Yes. That's how we see.

Charlotte Mei

Yeah. Okay. Wow. That's so fascinating.

And for all our listeners who menstruate, is there one piece of advice you can give to everyone to start doing when it comes to their periods? I know we all have different body constitutions, but is there one piece of advice that you can give?

Jun Negoro

Blood is the energetic basis of all women. So we see blood as an in-essence that's very important to our female body. Anything to do is with like menstrual cycle, even like trying to, if you are trying to conceive, pregnant women, postpartum, menopause...even menopause, it's all related to blood. So in TCM, we really focus on nourishing the blood at any stage of life in women. So I want you to eat blood nourishing food. There's a lot of blood nourishing tonics like dang gui soup, chicken, chicken essence, high quality protein. I know in Western medicine, protein is very important for the hormone —for building the hormone, for hormone balance. Dark green vegetables, tempe, red beans, these are all very blood nourishing food and tonics that every woman can benefit from. Yes.

Charlotte Mei

Oh wonderful. Okay. I've really taken down the list so I'm very happy with that. For our listeners who are not familiar with dang gui, what is it?

Jun Negoro

Dang gui is a blood tonic. It's a warming herb. So if you buy from, like the TCM pharmacy or even in the grocery stores, you might find like dang gui soup packets. Angelica Root —I think it's called in English.

It's very warming and nourishing. It's mixed with other herbs as well. To help boost the 'chi' and blood together. It helps to nourish the blood and also help with the blood circulation to have a healthy blood circulation in the body.

Charlotte Mei

Gotcha. So anyone can take that in general?

Jun Negoro

Yeah, in general, yes. In soups the dosage is not very high. So most women like especially after period, during period is a good time to take those tonic soups.

Charlotte Mei

And talking about those packets that we see in the supermarket, I mean, I love how accessible it is, but how I mean, I just look at the various packets of herbs and I'm lost. Are they safe to consume at home? As in when.

Jun Negoro

Yeah. Yes. Of course, if you don't want to be, like, maybe taking the same herb every single day. I think you can, on Google, there's a lot, you can Google them —what the tonics are for. The packets they do write, you know like, either boosting the 'chi' or digestive health even, they have different packets for different issues. So having it once a week in general, because it's kinda like a food based tonic. So having it once a week is okay for most people.

Charlotte Mei

Okay. So when it comes to TCM herbs, not everyone has to. If, you're not going for a specific type of medication, you don't necessarily have to go to a TCM medicine hall. You can simply get these two packets at the supermarket fo, to support general health.

Jun Negoro

For general health. Yes.. Yeah. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. For sure. There's a big topic on TCM, so there's a whole textbook on and psychology of TCM.

Charlotte Mei

Okay. fascinating. Okay. I probably should spend some time on Google learning a bit more about these herbs and maybe getting a packet for myself.

I also want to talk about mental health. You know, it's something that more people are aware of right now and we're doing so many things to help support it in different aspects of our health.

Does TCM have a role in mental health—?

Jun Negoro

—Yes for sure, it's a big topic in TCM

Charlotte Mei

What does that look like?

Jun Negoro

Yeah. So there's a whole textbook on psychology of TCM.

So TCM is a very holistic system that's really deeply rooted in a belief that the body, mind and spirit is interconnected. Right? So one of the key concepts is how do you associate the 'shen' and the organs? So 'shen' is what we call the mind or the spirit that resides, that lives in our heart. So a balanced 'shen' is associated with mental clarity, emotional stability, a overall sense of well-being.

And when this 'shen' or spirit is disturbed or unbalanced, it can cause symptoms such as stress, anxiety, insomnia, or poor memory. So these are all what we call mental health in TCM.

And this 'shen' is again affected by the other organs. So the five, again, it comes down to the five elements. So the five element theory states that the organs have different emotions.

So liver is to do with, associated with anger. So if you have too much anger, it will damage your liver function, liver system, not the physical organ, but the liver organ system. Or if you find that you're very angry all the time, then maybe your liver. It's not balanced. The 'chi' flow in the liver is not smooth.

And then heart is to do with joy. Spleen is worry overthinking. Lungs related to sadness or grief. And kidney is associated with fear or shock. So different organs have different emotions.

Too much of a emotion, let's say joy, like excessive joy. Some people suddenly have, got a TOTO and got a lot of money, sudden excessive joy, sometimes rare cases they might get heart attack. You know, these are very rare cases, but that's how like emotions and organs are related.

And I think maybe one example is anxiety. I see this a lot in the clinic. It's like a chronic state of fear, not just fear that's related to the kidney, but maybe there's a bit of worry or shame or guilt, just general uneasiness all the time. And some people even have like panic attacks. So TCM sees this as a palpitation or mental restlessness, which is again related to the heart, right?

So this causes the 'shen', the spirit to be unsettled. The 'shen' has no place of residence in the heart. The 'shen' is like floating... 'where do I go'? You know, the heart is not healthy enough to house me. So the heart blood might be deficient and then the heart heat might agitate the mind. That's why it's causing all these anxiety symptoms. Yeah.

So it's a lot to do with, again, the five organs and the spirit when it comes to mental health.

Charlotte Mei

I see. Okay, so not only do we have to balance our 'chi', we have to balance our 'shen'.

Jun Negoro

Yes, 'shen'.

Charlotte Mei

You're adding more layers here. Jun.

Jun Negoro

Yes, a lot of layers. Yeah it makes it very abstract? Y'know sometimes it's hard to grasp the concept because it's so abstract. Like what is 'shen'? Like 'it's not housing in my heart'. Like, what does it mean?

But I think that's kind of the beauty of TCM. You know, it's a very different way of understanding the basic concepts of our body, how we look at things, the food—

Charlotte Mei

—I agree.

Jun Negoro

—the nature, everything is all interrelated.

Charlotte Mei

In fact, I think it's quite poetic, you know, the way that you put it, and it makes me want to find out more.

So talking about the 'shen'. I mean, you know, we've spoken about how food can help our 'chi'. When it comes to 'shen', what are the modalities to help it? Is it still food? Is it, you know, acupuncture? What does that look like?

Jun Negoro

So let's take anxiety as an example. The causes can be due to irregular eating, eating too much, too fast at a very irregular timing. This will kinda cause burden again on the spleen and stomach, causing the stomach 'chi' and yin to be deficient.

Or you can be eating too much, damp producing food like dairy products, milk, cheese...too much of it will cause phlegm. Phlegm is like having too much dampness. Dampness is like having high humidity, too much excess fluid in our body, and then they congeal and make it very sticky and become phlegm. So this will obstruct the 'shen' and then it aggravates the anxiety. So that's the cause of, you know, emotional instability.

So you want to use, again, like bitter taste to drain the fire. If there's too much heat that's agitating the mind. You want a bit of bitter taste to drain the fire and then you want to use a bit of cooling, nourishing food. Nourishing 'yin' food to help support the heart. So just get back into balance.

Charlotte Mei

Wow I feel like, I mean I feel I'm equipped with knowledge now but at the same time... like I feel empowered but also like helpless at the same time because I don't know where to start.

I'm just thinking now, like, okay, every meal, I'm just going to make sure I have all five flavours, you know, just to balance things out. This is, wow, I'm learning so much. And I...you know, I've always had so much admiration for TCM physicians because the literature is so in depth and it's not as easy as Googling an answer.

Jun Negoro

Yes. It's sometimes even difficult for physicians to understand, sometimes because a lot of the text was written two or three thousand years ago. And it's not the way we write and speak now.

So a lot of the text, like this one quote that I found about mental health...so it says is, it's very poetic, actually: 'When shock affects the heart, it deprives it of its residents. The 'shen' has no place to return to and the thoughts become ceaselessness like anxiety and then 'chi' becomes chaotic.'

Charlotte Mei

Wow

Jun Negoro

It makes sense and it doesn't make sense, y'know? But it really kind of tells you that there's so many layers, so many principles that we have to consider when it comes to health. Yeah.

Charlotte Mei

I like that quote because it gives me a sort of visualisation, especially when you tell me that, you know, your spirit has no residence and it's abstract, but at the same time, it kind of gives this visualisation that empowers you to start working on something.

So I'm now going to address two questions that I received from my followers that I think many of us also have in our minds.

So one of them is I know this is very specific, but I myself, I've sprained my ankles so many times and I have seen both Western and modern doctors. So this person asks, you know, when it comes to screens, western doctors would advise to rest, whereas TCM physicians would advise to manipulate the sprain? So what is the rationale behind this?

Jun Negoro

I think we both Western and TCM agree that for the first 24 hours or to 48 hours, we ice it. Just to get the redness and the swelling down and then after that TCM will warm it because if you continue using ice or cold therapy it will kind of retard the flow of 'chi' and blood and impede the healing process.

So when you see, maybe a TCM doctor two or three days after, they will tell you to manipulate it because it's been, you know, two or three days. So they will do acupuncture or maybe gua sha cupping, moxibustion like heat therapy.

And the goal here is to promote the flow of 'chi', the energy, the blood to help reduce inflammation and reduce the pain. Because acupuncture helps to increase the endorphin, that helps to reduce the pain.

And then it also stimulates the body's natural healing mechanism. That's why we want to balance, rest and also gentle movement to promote healing. We will not tell you to go walk straight away. We would definitely say, 'Okay, gentle, don't put too much pressure'. But you don't want to be like, you know, resting completely because that will hinder recovery as well. So gentle stretches.

Like after this the sprain starts to heal. We will recommend warm therapy and gentle movement.

Charlotte Mei

Right. Yeah I have a friend, you know, she plays basketball very regularly. And for all her sprains, she tells me now she sees the TCM physician. She said, No more physio, no more modern medication, because apparently for her at least, TCM speeds up the recovery process.

Jun Negoro

That's good!

Charlotte Mei

Incredible. Yeah. So secondly and this is so apt for many things that we spoke about from digestive issues to, you know, the flu to, you know, even menstrual cramps. When should one see a western doctor? And when should they see a TCM physician?

Jun Negoro

Yes, definitely for western doctors, if you have any kind of emergencies or acute conditions, if you have a sudden severe injury, like heart attack, stroke, severe infections, it's definitely very important to have immediate medical attention by Western doctors.

Charlotte Mei

Sure

Jun Negoro

And the next one is diagnostic testing like X-ray, MRI. All these are just tools that Western doctors use. Blood test. These are things that you want to go to a Western doctor for. And of course, surgery, if you need removal of a tumour on your skin, joint replacement, organ transplant...this is very western medicine and this will be the primary option to see a Western doctor.

Yeah. And then for TCM doctors, if you just want to regulate your body, y'know they always say 'tiao li', just to balance out, to regulate. You know, for maybe your digestive health? It's not doing very well but it's not so critical. You need to see a doctor. You just want to regulate and to balance that, then you want to go for a TCM or I see a lot of stress management patients because acupuncture just helps with the stress reduction and anxiety and they don't want to take Western pills.

And I think some individuals they seek TCM in conjunction with Western medicine to complement your treatment.

Charlotte Mei

For sure

Jun Negoro

Yeah. So post cancer treatment you know chemo, if they lose their appetite, again, digestive health. Which is the source of 'chi' and blood, for you to recover, you want to do it together with TCM and Western medicine. And of course fertility like menstrual problem. I think a lot of TCM can help with that.

Charlotte Mei

Wonderful. And I like how both both systems are very complementary. So you can also say that TCM is for the management of health, for balancing out certain aspects. It's not, you know, of course not for the acute pain or if it's something that needs immediate attention, but almost like taking your health to another level. Would you say?

Jun Negoro

Yes definitely. And also, just as an education, have an awareness of your body. I think you learn a lot when you...like food, y'know, you maybe some things you think that you were doing it right. I see a lot in the clinics. They say they eat very healthy. But it's not right for you.

Y'know you learn a lot from that. And then that's how you kind of manage your own health at home. Yes.

Charlotte Mei

For sure. I think one of my main takeaways today is that the term 'healthy', as much as I don't like to use the term 'healthy', 'unhealthy'...but just for this purpose... the idea of 'healthy' is different from one person to another.

Jun Negoro

Yes definitely

Charlotte Mei

It's all about knowing where your baseline is, about your body composition and y'know, you can't compare one person to another. And you know, very similarly to modern nutrition, right? What is good for one person may not be good for the other.

Jun Negoro

Yes, yes definitely. And where you are in your life as well, I think that's important.

Like a pregnant woman will eat very differently, post natally. So at different stages of your life, you'll eat different things.

Charlotte Mei

Wonderful. Well Jun, that was so enriching. Thank you for sharing all of that.

Before you go, I've got two more questions for you. One of them, when someone is looking for a TCM physician, are there qualifications for them to look out for?

Jun Negoro

In Singapore is very strictly regulated. So in Singapore we have to graduate with a university qualification, —either local university or foreign university. And they do have a list of foreign universities that you have to graduate from.

And then we have board registration examination. So once you pass, then you are registered full licence TCM. So if you are not licensed, you will not see them practising. So I think in Singapore it's very safe, that you know, all TCM physicians are licensed.

Charlotte Mei

Okay, good. That's very good. You know, So look out for that qualification and that licence.

And finally, love talking about food, you know how much I love food. And so I want to know from you what is one dish you haven't had for a while that you would really love to have right now? It could be something nostalgic, that reminds you of a certain memory.

Jun Negoro

I think that will be Oden for me. You know what's oden?

Charlotte Mei

Yes!

Jun Negoro

You know because I'm half Japanese, half Taiwanese. But I grew up in Singapore, I love Singapore food. But my comfort food is always Japanese food. So oden it's like a, you know, a broth of savory, slightly sweet broth soup with a lot of vegetables and like fish cakes, a lot of daikon radish, konnyaku, the jelly —translucent thing made from konnyaku.

And then you have different fish cakes. Like chikuwa, hanpen. Which is very different from the local fish cakes and a lot of kelp rolls. Yeah. So this is something, oden is something that I will want to have.

Charlotte Mei

Y'know I have to admit, I haven't had a lot of oden in my life. But the ones that I've had, I really love it. There's something about certain Japanese dishes that have a wonderful balance of savoury and sweetness in it. Oden's definitely one of them.

Jun Negoro

And depending on like which region you're from, even within Japan, I think some places have like more sweeter version than other areas are more savoury. Yeah

Charlotte Mei

Wonderful. So, Jun, if you were craving Oden, where in Singapore would you go for that?

Jun Negoro

I usually make my own. They have an oden set, if you go like Isetan or DonDonDonki, they do have an oden set. So I usually buy the set and then some other additional vegetables that I buy and then I just make it at home because it's like a hotpot right.

So yeah, I just like to have it at all.

Charlotte Mei

Oh noted!

Jun Negoro

Yes

Charlotte Mei

Okay, now I know how to make my own Oden. I'll look for these sets in the supermarket

Jun Negoro

But you know it's a lot of like fish cakes in them, so you really want to add in a lot more vegetables in that set. Yes.

Charlotte Mei

For sure. I'm with you. Wonderful. And where can people find your work Jun?

Jun Negoro

You can find me on Instagram [@kanpobliss](#) so that's where I generally share my TCM tips with everyone

Charlotte Mei

Wonderful. I love them. They're so visually appealing, so easy to understand. And of course, I'm going to check out that assessment tool to find out my body composition.

Jun Negoro

Thank you so much. It's a free app, so do check it out. Yeah, I think you will find it very interesting and informative as well.

Charlotte Mei

Amazing. Thank you so much, Jun.

Jun Negoro

Thank you

Charlotte Mei

Wow. Absolutely. Mind blowing. That was so much information that Jun just shared there. For those of you watching on video, this is all the notes that I took down or rather scribbled throughout the episode. So much to digest. I hope you found that useful. And if you did share the link to this episode through text to a friend or even on your Instagram page, instagram stories, whatever you find is best to share this with your friends and family.

And of course, if you like what you've been hearing on In A Bite so far, remember to rate the show so more people get to know about it, too.

And for more information on nutrition and food —follow me on social media: [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), whichever platform you use. My handle is @thecharlottemei.

And for the full transcript to this episode, head over to my website, thecharlottemei.com/podcast

And I'll see you on the next one!