

Achieving balance with food

Tibetan doctor shares dietary advice for more healthful eating
by Lynn Schwartzberg H-T food columnist | lschwartzberg@heraldt.com
April 11, 2007
HeraldTimesOnline.com

Buying the book

“Tibetan Medical Dietary Book: Vol. I” is available at:

- www.tibetan-medicine.org
- www.paljorpublications.com
- www.akhilbooks.com/frmHome.aspx

It can also be purchased at Center for Wholism, 2401 N. Walnut St.



The Tibetan dish Pung Tsel Ngoma is shown at the Center for Wholism, where Yangbum Gyal practices Tibetan medicine. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

» [buy this photo](#)



Yangbum Gyal practices Tibetan medicine. Jeremy Hogan | Herald-Times

» [buy this photo](#)

Yangbum Gyal is a Tibetan medical doctor, the only of his kind in Indiana. Gyal has recently published a book on Tibetan dietary guidelines focusing on the potency and preparation of vegetables. Gyal and I recently had the opportunity to speak on the subject of healthy eating.

The book, “Tibetan Medical Dietary Book: Vol-I” took three years to complete. It was a labor of love for Gyal, who sees the foods we eat as an integral part of our individual health. He saw the need to address the Tibetan diet when the incidences of chronic illness, common in the Western Hemisphere, began showing up in the native population. Much of the change in Tibetan health came from the increase in sedentary living.

In Tibetan medicine, the phrase “you are what you eat” is taken quite seriously. More important to good nutrition is to identify what your body needs to find ultimate health and balance.

The logic of Gyal’s dietary plan can easily be applied to our diets as well. First of all, in Tibet, the stomach is thought to have four parts. Two parts are for food, one part water, and one part for air. It is important to drink water first, then food to prevent over eating.

Many vegetables and spices are used for their medicinal or health benefits. Gyal emphasized the importance of eating what is right for each individual. For example, if you have terrible spring allergies, avoid sweets and milk products. They cause mucous to form, which will increase symptoms. On the other hand, radishes can relieve symptoms.

Gyal prepared a few dishes to illustrate how easy it is to combine healthful ingredients into beautiful and delicious meals. First, we tasted flax bread. It is a beautiful spiraled bread, packed with nutrition. Flax is eaten for all-over body health.

The dish, Pengtsel Ngoma, is filled with vegetables, spices and bean thread. Each ingredient brings a rich dietary benefit to the eater. The broccoli increases blood level, lubricates the body and increases appetite. The carrots act as a liver tonic, anti-inflammatory, and as a cancer preventative. Bean thread is used for its ability to nourish muscles. Green onions relieve stress, cure insomnia and stimulate appetite.

We also tasted a cup of Tibetan butter tea. Yes, it really does have butter in it. It is drunk in Tibet for its ability to benefit people in high altitudes. It is drunk throughout the day. Although it seems unusual to the western palate, it is very delicious.

Sometimes it is best not to eat a certain food because it can exacerbate a condition. For example, if you have a fever, avoid garlic. Celery should be avoided by those with low blood pressure.

Dr. Yangbum Gyal arrived in Bloomington in 2000 to teach Tibetan language and culture. He left Bloomington to study at the Men-Tsee Khang, the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute of H.H. the Dalai Lama, for several years. Gyal returned to Bloomington in 2004 to teach at IU and to open his office for Tibetan medicine. His practice is based on treating the entire body and developing beneficial nutritional guidelines. He believes that we all can improve our health by eating the right foods and exercising. Sounds like a plan we can all use.

Pengtsel Ngoma

1 bundle of mung bean threads

2 carrots

1/2 pound asparagus

1/2 pound broccoli

5 green onions

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 cloves of garlic

1 stick cinnamon

3 pods of brown cardamom

2 teaspoons of fenugreek seeds

1-2 teaspoons salt

Soak the mung bean threads in warm water for about one hour. Grind cinnamon, brown cardamom and fenugreek to a fine powder. Cut carrot into thin slice pieces. Chop broccoli and green onion. Steam carrot, asparagus and broccoli over water in a large pot for few minutes, until tender. Use a pan/wok, set stove at medium, add vegetable oil, and wait until oil starts fuming. Add minced garlic, steamed carrot, asparagus, broccoli and green onion. Add a pinch of salt and ground spices. Stir-fry for 30 seconds and add the soaked mung bean thread. Continue to cook for a minute until the bean threads turn soft.

Flax bread

1 pound whole flour

1 cup of water

3 tablespoons of whole flax seeds

2 teaspoons vegetable oil

Make a sticky dough using water and cover the dough with a lid and keep in a warm place for 1/2 hour. Use a pan, set stove at medium, add vegetable oil, add ground flax seeds and stir it about one minute. Roll dough out into thin round discs and spread the mixture of flax seeds and oil on it. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and bake about 30 minutes.

Tibetan butter tea

3 cups of water

2 tea bags

1 cup of milk

1 tablespoons butter

1 teaspoons of salt

Put tea bags in water and boil for three to five minutes. When the tea color become brown, take tea bags out. Pour the tea into a churn vessel. Add butter, milk and salt to taste. Churn it about five minutes. Hot Tibetan butter tea is now ready to serve.