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# Finding Your Ground: A Guide to a Vibrant Late Summer

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**W**alk on the beach. Picnic in the park.  
Spend lazy days in the sun.

July and August bring promises of outdoor fun and life's simple pleasures. In the Chinese calendar, we have reached the transitional period of late summer, dominated by Earth element. Expansive *Yang* has just reached its peak in the June solstice and *Yin* is fully depleted but ready to rise again as the end of summer nears. Nature is at its most bountiful, with signs of abundance everywhere, from blooming flowers and ripe fruits to lush vegetation.

As the element between the four seasons, Earth occurs twice more often than each of the other four elements in the Chinese calendar, making it the most abundant element in nature. Earth is the element that represents the center, whereas Wood, Fire, Metal and Water in the Chinese Five Element system are related to the four cardinal directions — for example, South is home to Fire element. Associated with Mother Earth and her nurturing qualities, Earth is the bridge to the other four elements, a symbol of peace, stillness and moderation.

Earth's downward energy is what helps ground us. We may have grown up in a culture that encourages us to "reach high for your dreams," whereas the term "grounded" may bring up negative childhood memo-

ries. While dreams and aspirations may motivate us to work toward our goals, without a proper foundation to launch from or a framework to rely on, they will remain unrealized. When we are properly grounded, we are stable in our center and able to manifest our visions into reality.

## We Are The Five Elements of Nature

Each of us is born with a unique composition of the five elements. Knowing our natal elements brings awareness to how the five elements of the external world affect the elements within, enabling us to adapt to seasonal changes. Those lacking Earth in their natal constitution tend to be ungrounded and flit through life seemingly floating from one situation to the next, with difficulty grasping opportunities, while those with overwhelming Earth composition may struggle from sluggishness, weight problems and chronic fatigue — with a strong aversion to taking risks.

As we are part of nature, our qi is most vibrant in late summer when *Yang* dominates. What is blooming and ripening in nature is also happening within. This is the time of year to be most physically active. We find our ground when the body feels as bright as the Sun while the mind and spirit reflect the calmness of *Yin*, resulting in awareness of both our internal and external environment.



Cultivating a habit of mindfulness through practices such as meditation, pranayama, Qigong and gentle yoga is the first step toward getting grounded. These practices bring awareness to the body, quiet the mind and slow us down closer to the unhurried pace of Mother Earth. When we are present in the body and mind, we are more able to navigate through life's difficulties with a calm head and make sound decisions.

Our intuition also sharpens as we train to connect to the root. The gut feeling that we experience — the butterflies in the tummy, that certain knowing or that queasy feeling — is real. In Traditional Chinese

Earth in the Chinese Five Element system.

To harmonize with the season's vibrant Fire and heavy Earth elements, eat simply, choosing mostly plant-based foods that are "cooling" — a term in Chinese medicine that refers to the *Yin* or *Yang* nature of the food instead of the temperature. Cooling foods include cucumber, jicama, celery, water chestnut, squash, shitake mushroom, pear, watermelon, berries, buckwheat, peppermint and leafy greens such as spinach and chards. Burdock root, fig, rice and millet are especially healing and bring comfort to the spleen and stomach. Pungent foods such as

### *Each of us is born with a unique composition of the five elements.*

Medicine, Earth element rules the spleen, pancreas and the stomach, as well as the muscles and cells. The more tuned in we are to our body, the more we can listen within and trust what our gut — our center — is telling us.

#### **Summer Ends: Balancing Heat and Dampness**

Temperature may be at its peak, especially in the last two weeks of July. All this heat can cause dampness, a condition associated with overly strong Earth element. In nature, humidity and mold counts are higher than usual during this time. Keep your body moving to prevent lethargy, congestion, swelling of the joints and gastrointestinal disorders that can result from dampness in the environment and what we put into our body.

Foods that are sweet belong to Earth element. As most foods generally have the sweet taste, it is not difficult to add Earth element in our diet. The challenge lies in balancing the abundance of sweetness with other flavors, as too much Earth element leads to diseases such as diabetes, cancer and obesity. In the external environment, Earth element is already at its strongest as the Fire element of summer produces

ginger, chili peppers, cilantro, turmeric and kimchi, associated with Metal element, are also helpful in dispersing internal heat. Opt for a one or two-course meal rather than an intricate multi-course affair.

Avoid foods that are heavy, greasy, cold or uncooked — especially if you experience digestive or anxiety issues due to the decline of *Yang*. We may crave cold treats, iced beverages and raw salads in the heat of summer; however, while these foods temporarily cool the body, they create too much internal heat as the digestive system, which acts like a cauldron and has to spend extra energy to "cook" them. If you find that you must treat yourself to a cold drink, have it between meals so it does not interfere with the digestive process.

#### **Autumn Begins: Minding Your Mental Health**


August 8 takes us into the beginning of fall in the Chinese calendar, with Earth element giving birth to Metal. This is usually a time many of us start "grieving" and wishing that summer would never end. In nature, *Yin* is now on its way to overtake *Yang*. To synchronize with the season, start by clearing away summer's activities. Store the season's fond memories



into the heart and focus your inner spirit on what's waiting in the season ahead. Soon we will harvest the seeds that were planted in spring.

With the vibrancy of *Yang* now in a steady decline, add more Fire element into your diet to balance the rise of Metal element, associated with the emotion grief. Fire element foods include most red and purple fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, cherries and radish, and bitter greens such as arugula and dandelion greens. Wood element foods such as lemons and limes, which are sour and astringent in taste, help to stabilize the mind as the rise of *Yin* may bring anxiety and disturb the spirit within.

The busier we get, the more time we should take to unplug, sit still and reconnect to our center — especially with so many distractions in the modern world vying for attention. Take stock of your physical, emotional and mental states whenever you feel uneasy. Awareness of the body and mind allows us to check in within and identify where the discomfort comes from.

When we are grounded and in our center, we can observe all that is happening in the external world without judging or overreacting. We experience joy and gratitude as we go through life calmly and steadily, free of drama. 



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