

## Take a deep breath - Is it Christmas Yet?

I love summer time, but I really do look forward to the transition of the fall. It's the time to go back to school, get back to "business as usual," and become a little more industrious as we prepare for winter.

Well, the kids are back in school. I can tell because the morning commute takes a bit longer with the school bus stops ☺. And there is a change in the air. Even here in Florida we get a change of seasons. We've been able to open our windows and enjoy cooler breezes.

Bob Flaws, a renowned TCM practitioner, author and educator, reminds us that "humans exist within nature, or the universe, and our life functions are controlled by and resonate with the greater forces of the world of which we are but a part." In other words, true health can only be achieved when the internal microcosm is in harmonious balance with the external macrocosm.

He quotes from the Nei Jing (Inner Classic): "He who would nourish life surely follows (the changes of) the four seasons, adapts to cold and heat, harmonizes joy and anger, and dwells in calm."

And so, what are the energies of the fall? Well, with fall comes a sense of gathering in, stocking up, mingled with a sense of loss as the light begins to fade and the air chills. As spring was an expansive time of breaking through and proliferation, fall is a contractive time of pulling in and dying back. The life cycle completes itself in autumn. Fall and winter are times of rest, inward reflection and storage and recuperation. In fall people should go to bed early and try to maintain a tranquil mind. In particular, they should avoid anxiety. Physical activity should begin to be curtailed somewhat during this season of harvest.

But, wait a minute, it seems like I blinked and September was over. Now, Halloween is just around the corner. And we all know what comes after that: November. Thanksgiving and of course, the heralding in of the Holiday Season. December is full of activities and busy-ness: Christmas, Hannukah, Kwanza; parties, parades, and other festivities. Time seems to be speeding up. We won't be able to catch our breath until 2007! Our typical autumn activities sure don't seem to match the feeling of "gathering in" do they? How do we balance the time of year with our activities so that we, ourselves, remain balanced and healthy?

It's not too late to develop a strategy to get in balance and, even more importantly, stay in balance this fall. We don't have to wait until we're totally stressed and worn-out or down right sick before we allow ourselves to attune with the energies of the season.

The majority of humans are healthiest when they live a regular lifestyle, rising in the morning, working during the day, and sleeping at night. It is best to eat at the same times each day and establish a routine. Yet how do we do that? I know that many see their lives spinning around them. The only 'routine' is that of "go, go, go."

Well, the power of the moment is NOW. So right now, take a few minutes to think about how you can gently put some routine in your life that balances work and play and that will nourish you, sustain you and keep you strong so that you can actually enjoy the many activities of the day and the season.

First of all don't forget to breathe.

I mean really breathe.

I mean a big, deep, slow, "fill your belly up and release slowly" kind of breathing.

I mean breathe that way for more than 1 or 2 breathes. Consciously breathe deeply, slowly for 2-3 minutes. Several times a day.

The Daoists observed over the millennia that a thirty second breath was the minimum an average person should be able to do if he or she wanted to breathe well under normal circumstances.

I know that by today's standards (weak, shallow breathing being considered normal) this 30 second breath may sound difficult to achieve. So, let's just start out lengthening your breath by counting. It goes something like this: Inhale, 1, 2, 3, 4; hold 1, 2, 3, 4; exhale 1, 2, 3, 4; hold 1, 2, 3, 4. Inhale 1,2,3,4, and so on. Do this slow, conscious kind of breathing for 2-3 minutes several times per day. Take a few minutes before you rush out the door to begin your daily activities to just Breathe. At your desk, while your waiting in a line, after dinner, just before bed....you get the idea....Breathe.

Consciously Breathe.

It has been echoed throughout the ages that two of the important keys to health are through diet and exercise. We all keep looking for another explanation, or another way. It seems too simple. We choose to ignore this advice or minimize it or put it in the "I'll get around to that tomorrow" category. But this is just as true today as it was 4,000 years ago when QiBo counseled the Yellow Emperor.

We complicate things. It's simple really. According to Dr. Joseph Mercola, "No matter what your health challenge is, you should eliminate or at least significantly reduce the sugars and grains, particularly the processed forms, in your diet."

So eliminate the sugars and the sugary foods – glucose, fructose, all the "-oses" as well as the refined, processed foods. Really. Do yourself a favor: don't get started on the Halloween candy.

Eat a well balanced diet with plenty of fresh vegetables(Cooking is okay, preferably steamed); some fruit, and protein.

Avoid overdrinking cold drinks and eating too many, raw, cold foods. This is not the time of year to go overboard on cold food and drink. Because the weather can still be hot and dry during this season (until to early November), one may feel thirsty and parched, however, indulging and assuaging this thirst with chilled drinks and frozen treats only damages the spleen and stomach yang qi . That's Chinese Medicine lingo for "shooting yourself in the foot" ☺

Take a multi-vitamin and mineral whole-food supplement every day.

Drink plenty of good water. Eight glasses a day. I don't mean tea, crystal light, juice, etc. I mean plain, old fashioned, un-adulterated water.

MOVE during the day. I realize that not everyone can join a gym or buy a treadmill. But do something that makes you break out in a sweat for about 20-30 minutes every day. Every Day. Raining, snowing, windy. Really. Every day. A regular exercise plan is the best. And what works the best is what you DO. So find something enjoyable: walk, bike, swim, stretch, whatever. Just DO IT! MOVE.

Get a good night's sleep. Eight hours worth. That's still the recommended amount of sleep needed for the body to re-nourish and repair itself and for you to perform at your best.

There are many people that insist that they "do just fine" on 4-5 hours of sleep, or less. But the reality is that we can entrain our bodies, much like soldiers do in combat situations. And while that may be necessary in combat conditions, it is not a recommended approach to health or well being.

We have what amounts to an epidemic of insomnia today. It seems like every other week there is another sleep aid being advertised. Many people have been wound up in high gear for so long they really have a hard time "turning it off" when they finally do go to bed. (They've entrained their bodies to be in high gear constantly.)

A few tips: Slow down. Relax. Don't drink alcohol before bedtime. The alcohol may seem like a "sleepy friend" at first, but it can actually be the cause of waking up and tossing and turning the rest of the night; and feeling fuzzy and "off" in the morning. Instead, try having a cup of warm water and a magnesium supplement, like "Calm" by Nature's Vitality. Chances are pretty good that you have a magnesium deficiency anyway, and magnesium is a natural muscle relaxant, so it can be just the thing to take the "edge off."

Then, turn the T.V. off. Listen to a relaxation tape instead.

Sleep in a dark, well-ventilated room.  
And Breathe.

You will want to keep your immune system strong, so in addition to your whole food vitamin and mineral supplement (like Catalyn, from Standard Process) you might want to consider seeing your local acupuncturist or doctor of Oriental Medicine to begin taking a Chinese herbal formula known to build and strengthen Qi along with the immune function.

Let's see. We don't want to get too complicated or lengthy, so a quick review is in order. It goes something like this:  
In order to stay on top of the fall activities we should

develop a routine NOW.

1. BREATHE
2. Eliminate sugars and processed foods from your daily food intake.
3. Include a lot of fresh vegetables and some fruits and some protein (in other words, eat a well balanced diet)
4. Avoid cold drinks and too many cold, raw foods
5. Take a whole of good food multi-vitamin and mineral supplement everyday
6. WATER. Drink 8 glasses of good water every day
7. MOVE. Exercise 20-30 minutes every day.
8. RELAX. Sleep 8 hours per night.
9. Consider taking a Chinese herbal formula to strengthen your immune function.

And last, but not least, WASH YOUR HANDS. This can not be over stressed. Even at the most sophisticated medical center in the country the number one strategy for staying healthy and for preventing the spread of disease is proper hand washing. As we approach “cold and flu” season it becomes even more important to WASH YOUR HANDS.

I know you're busy. We all are.  
Be kind to yourself.  
Develop a healthy routine now.  
Balance your work with play.  
And if nothing else,  
Remember to BREATHE.

Namaste  
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