

Nourishing the Liver

By Joanne Hay

It's Spring Down Under. The Sun returns. Time for rebirth.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, Spring time is when the 'Chi' is in the Liver Meridian more than any other time of year. The Liver energy is considered the General, the director of energy, the leader of all the meridians, the instigator, the birth. So we are at the beginning again. Each Spring, as it has done for millenia, chi begins its yearly movement round the body, focusing in each meridian as the moon waxes and wanes. (Forgive us those in the Northern Hemisphere for discussing Spring, while you are experiencing descent into winter darkness.)

Spring is here. We are being born again, and as with our own birth, we are bestowed with the bounteous stores of energy our bodies have gathered during our time in the womb of the winter months. Suddenly our bodies release this energy, we clear away any accumulations and begin the ascent into the most Yang time of year, High Summer. We'll need to be in tip top shape to cope with the extra energy needs of Summer. So our bodies begin to naturally detoxify.

Our Liver energy is responsible for the free flow of energy which is needed to clear away accumulations and project us into Summer. What happens in the body when the Liver Meridian is not flowing freely?

Symptoms such as:

- ligament and muscle tightness or pain (caused by Liver stuckness and or Yin deficiency*)
- depression with or without bursts of anger, grumpiness, crankiness (caused by stuckness and or Liver Yin deficiency*)
- itchy scalp, eyes, nasal passages and skin, usually put down to pollen allergies, but if the Liver was moist and moving well, these symptoms wouldn't manifest
- psychosis caused by liver wind which occurs when Liver Yin is deficient
- digestive difficulties like bloating, constipation and diarrhoea alternating, floating stool - Liver stuckness impinging on the digestive processes
- angry red swelling pimples or sores on the face and neck - Liver Fire caused by either stuckness or Yin deficiency

- dry eyes - Yin deficiency
- headaches - Yin deficiency, fire, stuckness or wind
- irritability - Yin deficiency or stuckness

* Yin is the principle related to the feminine, nourishing, moistening, cooling energies of the body.

You may notice these symptoms appearing or worsening during Spring.

How do we deal with these symptoms?

The Liver is trying to do it's job but in order to do so it needs, you guessed it, Nourishment.

Most of these symptoms are expressions of liver Yin deficiency so nourishing the Yin would be the best way to bring balance.

In the case of excessive symptoms like red hot pimples, painful muscles or ligaments or digestive difficulties involving pain some may be tempted to 'cleanse' the Liver with herbs and fasting. Be aware however, that most people have impaired digestion and starving it or giving the body only cold raw juices will not improve this, nor will herbs be very well digested. Instead, most excessive situations will respond to nourishment.

How do you Nourish the Liver?

Ancient Chinese Medical Texts prescribe the organ of an animal to treat the organ that is out of balance and its associated energy meridian. Kidney of an animal for the Kidney energy, tripe for digestion, liver for the Liver. The Li-Chi, a handbook of rituals published during China's Han era (202B.C. to 220A.D.), lists liver as one of the Eight Delicacies.

Practically every cuisine has liver specialties. Some cultures place such high value on liver they consider it the seat of the soul. It is so sacred that human hands can't touch it. As soon as a beast is slain, special implements extract the liver and cut it into as many pieces as there are members in the tribe. They would eat it there and then, raw and warm. Much like other great predators, ancient humans sought out older animals who would have larger livers and fatty offal and would often left their lean rump for the carrion.

It is widely known by all ancient societies that liver is the most nourishing food on the planet.

Liver contains more nutrients, gram for gram, than any other food including:

- High-quality protein
- Vitamin A - nature's most concentrated source
- All the B vitamins in abundance, particularly vitamin B12 if consumed raw
- One of our best sources of folic acid
- A highly usable form of iron
- Trace elements such as copper, zinc and chromium; liver is our best source of copper
- A yet unidentified but proven to exist [anti-fatigue factor](#)
- CoQ10, a nutrient that is especially important for cardio-vascular function if consumed raw
- A good source of purines, nitrogen-containing compounds that serve as precursors for DNA and RNA.

But isn't Liver Dangerous?

In spite of widespread tradition and abundant scientific evidence on the health benefits of liver, conventional nutritionists now warn against its consumption.

Toxins

“What about the Toxins” is a common response to the suggestion of consuming liver. Indeed, one of the roles of the liver is to neutralize toxins (such as drugs and pesticides); but the liver does not store toxins. Instead, poisonous compounds that the body cannot neutralize and eliminate are likely to lodge in the fatty tissues and the nervous system. The liver is not a storage organ for toxins but it is a storage organ for many important nutrients (vitamins A, D, E, K, B12 and folic acid, and minerals such as copper and iron). These nutrients provide the body with some of the tools it needs to get rid of toxins.

So why would you want to clean something that is not dirty? Practitioners who recommend liver cleansing usually mean, deprive your body of any substantial food so your liver doesn't have to work on digestion and can clean your blood of toxins. Again, this will only work well if your digestion is strong and you are not deficient of energy. Still, healing through nourishment is, in most cases, more valid a protocol.

It deserves to be mentioned: Do not consume the livers of animals who've lived in confinement. Pastured and Organic are better choices (if you're in Australia organic means animals have access to grass and natural feed). If you only have supermarket options, ask for calves liver, they have lived on pasture.

Vitamin A Toxicity

Concerns about Vitamin A toxicity stem from studies in which moderate doses of **synthetic** vitamin A were found to cause problems and even contribute to birth defects. But **natural** vitamin A found in liver is an extremely important nutrient for human health and does not cause problems except in extremely large amounts.

The *Merck Manual* cites vitamin A toxicity in Arctic explorers who developed drowsiness, irritability, headaches and vomiting, with subsequent peeling of the skin, within a few hours of ingesting several million units of vitamin A from polar bear or seal liver. These foods are incredibly high in Vitamin A and need to be eaten with foods that are high in Vitamin D such as blubber from these animals. When A and D are in balance, that is a ration of 10:1, toxicity doesn't occur so easily.

The putative toxic dose of 100,000 IU per day is contained in two-and-one-half 100-gram servings of duck liver or about three 100-gram servings of beef liver. From the work of [Weston Price](#), we can assume that the amount in primitive diets was about 50,000 IU per day.

A good recommendation for liver is one 100-gram serving of beef, lamb, bison or duck liver (about 4 ounces) once or twice a week, providing about 50,000 IU vitamin A per serving. Chicken liver, which is lower in vitamin A, may be consumed more frequently. If you experience headaches or joint pains at this level, cut back until the symptoms go away.

Eat it Raw

If you are trying to balance Liver yin deficiency eating your liver raw will nourish the yin more than cooked. Eating Liver raw ensures you get the full dose of B6 and B12, CoQ10, enzymes and possibly the anti-fatigue factor. It's yin energy soothes dried liver symptoms (itchiness, headaches, dry eyes, muscle tightness, irritability).

The best way to eat raw liver is to freeze it for 14 days to avoid any parasitic infection (unlikely but possible especially in those with impaired immune systems). When frozen, cut it into teaspoon sized pieces and put them into little coin bags. Keep them in your freezer and use one baggie at a time, chopping into little pills to swallow with a drink. The primary benefit of swallowing liver pills frozen, is you can't taste it. I take my liver pills with raw milk for the extra nourishment and so I don't burp up the taste.

The physician Max Gerson used raw liver juice, extracted with a special juicer that pressed out the liquid, in his original healing protocol with pancreatic cancer patients. His daughter, Charlotte Gerson, later dropped this part of the protocol because of the unavailability of fresh clean liver without bacterial contamination. Now a crude liver extract injection or desiccated liver tablets are used in the current protocol. However, Dr. Nicholas Gonzalez, a New York doctor who treats cancer holistically, insists that all his patients eat raw liver.

Also grate frozen liver into the yolk of an egg or add it to tomato juice.

Liver Recipes

Lynn Razaitis, Leader of the Atlanta, Georgia Chapter of the [Weston A Price Foundation](#), has found some wonderful medieval European recipes. She recommends [florilegium.org](#), where participants provide translations and comments on recipes in old cookbooks.

She says, "Ancient cookbooks even describe the use of liver to thicken sauces, apparently by pressing raw purified liver through a fine strainer and adding it to sauce that was then carefully heated but not boiled. (During Lent, fish livers served to thicken sauces!) As long as the liver flavor does not overpower the flavor of the sauce, this could be a good way to get liver into your family without them ever knowing it!

A liver recipe from a 1529 Spanish cookbook goes like this: "Take onions and cut them very small, like fingers, and fry them gently with fatty bacon; and then take the liver of a kid or a lamb or a goat and cut them into slices the size of a half walnut, and fry it gently with the onion until the liver loses its color; then take a crustless piece of toasted bread soaked in white vinegar and grind it well, and dissolve it with sweet white wine; and then strain it through a woolen cloth; and then

cast it over the onion and the liver, all together in the casserole; and cast in ground cinnamon; and cook until it is well thickened and when it is cooked, prepare dishes.”

Mufarraka

A great, high-cholesterol liver dish from an ancient Middle Eastern cookbook has been translated by Betty Cook. Note the inclusion of wonderful spices, not normally associated with liver.

14 ounces chicken livers

14 ounces chicken gizzards

1/2 teaspoon salt

8 egg yolks

1 1/2 teaspoon coriander

1 1/2 teaspoon cumin

3/4 teaspoon pepper

1 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

2 tablespoons sesame oil for frying

1/4 cup lemon juice

Bring 3 cups water to a boil with 1/8 teaspoon salt, add gizzards and simmer 50 minutes. Near the end of this time, bring another 3 cups water and 1/8 teaspoon salt to a boil and cook livers in it 3 minutes. Drain both, cut into 1/2-inch by 1/2-inch pieces, put into a bowl and mix with egg yolks and spices. Heat oil and fry the mixture about 4 minutes, sprinkle with lemon juice and serve.

Liver Pat  

The website foodiesite.com provides this intriguing recipe for liver pat   from Scandinavia.

Unlike the French versions, Scandinavian pat  s don't usually contain alcohol or garlic and they have a smoother texture.

8-10 Portions

300 g calf's liver or pig's liver

300 g lean pork meat, such as pork fillet

300 g pork fat

1 onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons unbleached white flour
300 ml milk
1 egg
pinch ground cloves
pinch ground all spice
sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Note: 300 grams is slightly less than 3/4 pound or and 300 ml is 1 1/4 cups.

Dice the liver, lean pork meat and fat into small pieces. Set aside 75 g of the pork fat and place it in an oven dish in a low oven. Cook the fat until it has melted down. Lightly grease the sides and base of the paté container. A standard loaf tin works well.

Preheat an oven to 350°F. Mince the onion, liver, pork and remaining pork fat through a mincer (meat grinder) 3-4 times until smooth.

Melt butter in a saucepan over a moderate heat. Add the flour to the butter and cook it for a couple of minutes. Slowly add the milk while stirring until you have a thick smooth sauce. Add the minced liver mixture and stir it until well combined. Remove the pan from the heat and allow it to cool slightly. Mix in the egg, ground cloves, all spice and a little salt and pepper.

Pour the paté mixture into the greased loaf pan, place in a baking pan and fill the pan 3/4 high with hot water. Place the paté on the center shelf in the pre-heated oven and cook for 1 1/2 hours. To test for doneness, insert a thin knife or skewer into the center of the paté. When the paté is ready, it should come out clear. (The center of the paté should reach at least 170°F. If you have a meat thermometer use this to test if it is ready).

Remove the paté from the oven when cooked and leave it to cool in the container. When cooled, turn the paté out onto a plate and serve it as part of a smorgasbord or use it for *smorresbrod* (open sandwiches) or as a starter or canapé. Mustard, cress, gherkins, grapes and chutney all make good accompaniments

Liver with Sour Cream

A delicious liver recipe from Russia is found at ruscuisine.com.

Serves 4

2 1/2 pounds liver (calf, pork or beef), sliced

2 onions, chopped

1 cup sour cream

4 tablespoons butter

2 cup beef stock

2 tablespoons dill, freshly chopped

2 tablespoons unbleached white flour

sea salt and pepper to taste

Wash, pat dry, and sprinkle each piece of liver with salt and pepper. Dredge in flour, fry on each side in butter and remove. SautÃ© the onions until golden brown and then layer both liver and onions in a deep pot. Deglaze the pan with beef stock, stir well and add the sour cream, stir, then add to the liver and onions. Mix well and cover. Cook slowly over low-heat for 20 minutes.

Uncover, stir well, re-cover and cook for another 10 minutes. Remove liver from pot, arrange on individual plates and pour sauce over the slices. Sprinkle with the dill. This is very good when served with boiled or fried potatoes or rice.

Nira Reba

The Japanese consider liver an important food for pregnant women. The following recipe is adapted from one posted at japanesefood.about.com.

Serves 4

1/2 pound pork liver

1 tablespoon grated ginger

1 bunch nira (Chinese chives)

2 tablespoons arrowroot powder

1 tablespoon grated ginger

2 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon sake (rice wine)

1 tablespoon water and 1 teaspoon potato starch

lard for frying

Cut liver into bite-sized pieces and marinate in a mixture of soy sauce, sake and ginger for 20 minutes. Remove liver from the sauce, pat dry and dredge in arrowroot. Heat lard in a deep pan and fry the liver pieces. Remove liver to a heated plate. Chop nira into short pieces and sauté in a frying pan. Add deep-fried liver and sauté with nira. Add the sauce used for marinating liver to the frying pan and stir well. Add the mixture of water and potato starch, stir quickly and remove from heat. Serve immediately.

Here's a recipe from an Australian Weston Price Member, Nik, memorably called Dirty Rice.

Dirty Rice

3/4 pound liver, rinsed

and trimmed

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons butter

1 onion, finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced 2 cups uncooked long-grain brown rice

4 cups chicken stock

1 tablespoon gelatin (optional)

sea salt to taste

1/2 teaspoon ground black

pepper

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

1 cup thinly sliced green onions (optional)

Grate or mince liver. Heat oil and butter in a large saucepan. Saute onion, liver and garlic, stirring constantly, about 8 - 10 minutes. Add rice and stir until coated with oil. Saute until rice looks milky. Add stock, gelatin, salt, pepper and cayenne pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer. Cover and cook on lowest heat for 1.5 - 2 hours, until rice has absorbed liquid. Fluff rice with a fork, then sprinkle with green onion and serve.

What Else Nourishes the Liver?

Of course, you are what you eat, but there are other lifestyle choices you can make to nourish the Liver.

Exercise

Since the Liver Meridian Energy is considered the General, it's primary function is the governing of the free flow of the energy of the whole system. You can influence the flow of the Liver if you influence the flow of whole system's energy. Yoga, qi gong, dance and other forms exercise encourages energy to flow freely, thus soothing the liver. It is impossible to exaggerate the effectiveness of exercise on Liver energy stuckness.

Emotions

The Liver is deeply affected by emotions. Allowing emotions to flow freely, expressing them to their fullest and then letting them go, is the best way to nourish the Liver. Exposing yourself to emotionally taxing situations or indulging in addiction to your favourite emotions will cause increased liver symptoms. If an upset does occur, be sure to safely discharge any emotional energy immediately (if appropriate) or very soon after. You may find Spring brings up old emotions, stored in your body to be 'processed'. One way to do this is to deliberately tantrum. Bash your bed with a pillow or broom handle, wail at the ocean or some natural environment, even ask a trusted friend to sit beside you while you lie on the floor and bash it with your fists, like a toddler. You may find you begin to laugh, when this becomes a true belly laugh, you are done. Incidentally, laughing yoga, laughing on purpose, releases much pent up emotional energy also. Emotional Freedom Technique is another simple way to move through emotional stuckness.

What to Avoid

Although we like to concentrate on Nourishment, the Liver certainly responds to some foods and non-foods negatively. So in Spring especially, avoid:

1. refined sugar
2. caffeine including chocolate
3. alcohol and other stimulating drugs
4. chilli and garlic stimulate Liver Fire, avoid if you have these symptoms
5. food additives of any kind

6. vegetable oils other than olive oil, coconut oil, sesame oil and palm kernel oil
7. Deep fried foods, even in traditional fats, attribute to Liver Fire. These should only be consumed in the cooler months

What about Detoxing?

If you feel you must detoxify the system, the most appropriate time of year to do so is Spring. Since the body is naturally changing and birthing new energy this is the best time to help it along. Consider our ancestors. Each winter's end a shortage of foods causes a slight fasting with villages finishing off their stores of grains, tubers, dried meats and possibly bones stored in the snow. Eating what is in season ensures you stay inline with your body's expectations.

Fasting at the end of winter can look quite different to most 'detox' regimes. Instead of drinking only juiced raw vegetables, why not try the [milk cure](#), where you take only milk for a matter of days to several weeks, much like a modern naturopathic style fast. Be sure to only use the best quality RAW milk from cows feasting on the fast growing green grass of spring. This cure will both nourish you and allow you to detoxify because it is easy to digest.

If you can't do raw milk, a small percent of the caucasian population, try a broth fast. For a few days only eat chicken, beef and vegetable broth. Enemas are a traditional detoxifying remedy as are hot baths, saunas and some clay drinks. (Be careful with clay if you have heavy metal toxicity). Remember to always and only Nourish. If it doesn't feel nourishing to do any of the above, just don't.

Welcome Spring. Welcome Free Flowing Liver. What new possibilities have we buried in our beings through the winter? May they erupt into beautiful butterfly like creations and fly into Summer.

About the Author...

Joanne Hay, Editor of Nourished Magazine, Chief Nourisher and Mother of three is very grateful to live in Byron Bay and be able to share all she has learned about Nourishment. She has trained as an Acupuncturist (unfinished), Kinesiologist (finished) and parent (never finished). She serves the Weston A Price Foundation as a chapter leader. She loves sauerkraut, kangaroo tail stew,

home made ice cream, her husband Wes and her kids Isaiah, Brynn and Ronin (in no particular orderâ€¦well maybe ice cream first).