

CHINESE HERBAL CHICKEN SOUP

One of the most common ways to use tonic herbs in China is cooking them in a soup with chicken and vegetables. This is because chicken is thought to bring out the Chi-tonifying and Blood-nourishing aspects of the herbs. Generally speaking, tonic herbs have a pleasant taste which does not adversely affect the flavorful aspects of mealtime soups.

The following herb soup mix has been recommended at the An Hao Clinic with good results:

Astragalus
Black fungus
Codonopsis
Dioscorea
Longan
Lotus seed
Lycium fruit
Polygonatum
Seaweed

The herbs astragalus, codonopsis, and dioscorea are classified by Chinese herbalists as qi tonics. They are reputed to benefit digestion, aid the absorption of nutrients, and enhance energy. Astragalus has been shown to improve immune system responses, codonopsis aids production of red blood cells, and dioscorea regulates blood sugar. The two dried fruits, lycium and longan, are classified as blood tonics. They are reputed to treat anemia, reduce fidgeting, and benefit sleep. Lycium has been shown to protect the liver from chemical damage and reduces blood sugar. Black fungus and seaweed add a satisfying texture to the soup. Black fungus has been shown to reduce platelet aggregation (excessive clotting of the blood) and seaweed provides many mineral nutrients. Polygonatum is traditionally classified as a yin tonic, which restores moisture. Recent studies indicate that it is also a heart tonic and that it reduces blood sugar. Lotus seed is a mild sedative useful for relieving hyperactivity; it is rich in proteins.

To make the soup, place 1 to 2 pounds of chicken with skin removed in a medium sized pot and add enough water to cover. Bring to a boil and remove any residue which floats to the top. Add in the whole package of herbs, two cloves of crushed or grated garlic, two thin slices of fresh ginger, and a teaspoon of salt. Bring to a slow boil, cover, and simmer for 50-60 minutes.

Add sliced fresh vegetables, such as carrots and celery at this time and simmer for an additional 5 minutes to soften them. Then add 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, 1 teaspoon of sesame oil, and 1 teaspoon wine (optional). Remove from heat. All the herb materials are edible except astragalus which is too fibrous, and this item should be removed before serving (it is the long flat herb).

The package of herbs contains about 5 ounces of dried herb material. This recipe makes enough soup for four persons, so each one gets about 35 grams of Chinese herbs.

For individuals recovering from serious illness or other debilitating experience, the soup can be taken daily for about one week to restore strength. Others may wish to enjoy this dish about once a week for a great energy boost.