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Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical Food Therapy- Constitutions and Food

The **Yang Sheng Fa** or **Principles for Nourishing Life** of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine include taking control of health, according to an individual's constitutional type, through modification of diet, mental state and daily activities. The concept of constitution is widely applied in the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Constitutional evaluation is an important process in clinical diagnosis and treatment; it is also critical for health promotion and disease prevention. Constitution is not constant or unchangeable; factors including environment, emotions, and exercise, as well as disease and injury, can easily change the body's condition. The constitution of each animal is governed by congenital and acquired factors; the gender, age, personality, structure, metabolism, and function of organs all combine to determine an animal's susceptibility to pathogenic factors and how it responds to them. In TCVM dietary management, one considers both the elemental constitutions of Water, Wood, Fire, Earth and Metal, which often refer to personality, and the different types of physical or body constitutions that an animal may demonstrate: 1. **Neutral**, 2. **Qi deficient**, 3. **Yang deficient (Cold)**, 4. **Yin deficient (Hot)**, 5. **Phlegm-damp**, 6. **Damp-heat**, 7. **Blood stasis**, 8. **Qi stagnation**, 9. **Dry**, and 10. **Special** constitution. These types refer more to physical characteristics and physiologic tendencies, common health problems and how an animal adapts to the external environment; and they require different dietary treatment for optimum health.

1. **Neutral type** individuals look healthy, have a strong physique, stable emotional and mental states, and seem optimistic. They have lustrous coats, strong nails, bright eyes, moist pink tongues, and proper senses of smell, taste and hearing. They sleep well, have good appetites, normal bowel and urinary habits, good exercise tolerance, are able to adapt to environmental changes and are not overly sensitive to heat or cold. They can eat a wide variety of proteins, vegetables, condiments, and an even balance of energetically hot, cold and neutral foods.
2. **Qi deficient type** individuals tend to have flabby or weak muscles, are introverted and timid, and may be very quiet or have feeble voices. They may have shortness of breath and often fatigue easily; they frequently have sweaty feet and teeth marks on the sides of the tongue. They are frail and sensitive to the environment, with relatively weak immune systems, taking a long time to recover from illnesses. Rabbit, tripe, pumpkin and sweet potatoes, as well as Shitake mushrooms may benefit these animals.
3. **Yang deficient type** individuals tend to be quiet and introverted, have flabby muscles, have cold feet, and frequent sleepiness. They may have a pale and bulky tongue, with or without a whitish coating, and are susceptible to health problems such as edema (swelling,) diarrhea, and excess throat secretions. They often have clear and copious urine and soft stools. They are sensitive to

Judith M. Shoemaker, DVM

305 Nottingham Road, Nottingham, PA 19362 Phone: 717-529-0526 www.judithshoemaker.com

noise, have discomfort after consuming cold foods and liquids, and in cold, windy, and humid environments. Certain energetically warmer foods such as lamb and venison, as well as the herbs basil, rosemary and thyme may help warm these chilly ones.

4. **Yin deficient type** individuals usually have a thin or sturdy physique, are outgoing, impatient, and may be easily annoyed. They may complain about being too warm, have a dry mouth or nose; the tongue may be red with yellowish coating or may have no coating at all, not even moisture. They prefer to drink cold water, may have dry, hard stools- even constipation, and scanty urine that is often dark in color. They don't like hot and dry environments and are susceptible to dry cough, fatigue, insomnia and certain chronic conditions. Colder foods like duck, rabbit, turkey, pork, asparagus, apples and pears may cool these hotties.
5. **Phlegm and dampness type** individuals are usually overweight have a larger tummy. They are mild tempered with steady and patient personalities. They may seem to experience heaviness in the body, dizziness, and may tire easily. They may look fatigued and sleep during the day, frequently snoring. With a low metabolic rate, they tend to be overweight or may be bloated due to fluid retention. Their tongue may look sticky, moist and bulky, and be covered with a thick or greasy coating. They often have oily skin and hair, sweating feet, have phlegm in their throat and chest stuffiness. They have a preference for carbohydrates and fatty foods and are susceptible to diabetes, metabolic syndrome or cardiovascular diseases. They are very sensitive to dampness and uncomfortable in humid and rainy environments. Additives such as alfalfa, kidney beans, mushrooms and turnips might help dry these soggy types.
6. **Damp heat type** individuals are of normal or thin physique and tend to be irritable and short tempered. They may seem to feel heaviness in their muscles, have constipation, dry stools, yellow urine, and vaginal discharges. The tongue coating may be yellow and greasy. They are prone to skin and urinary tract problems. They are sensitive to humid and hot environments, especially in late summer or early autumn. String beans, mustard, spinach and marjoram as well as cooler proteins may cool and calm these hot bodies and tempers.
7. **Blood stasis type** individuals are often impatient and forgetful. They may have dry skin and poor, thin hair coats. Uncomfortable in cold environments, they bruise easily and are susceptible to bleeding gums, blood in their urine and stools, painful conditions and abnormal growths. Chicken, carrots, parsley and liver may get the blood moving in these.
8. **Qi stagnation type** individuals are mostly thin and prone to being emotionally unstable, melancholy or suspicious. They may appear depressed, nervous, anxious or timid and don't deal well with stress, especially in winter and autumn, and on rainy days. They may not sleep well and suffer from separation anxiety; females may be prone to breast lumps. Hawthorn berry, chestnut, parsley, and carrots, as well as mackerel and beef may help stimulate their Qi.
9. **Dry type** individuals are often skinny do not gain weight easily. They feel thirsty and have dryness of the eyes, mouth, throat, lips and skin. They may have coughs without mucus, have itchy skin, nose or eyes, and constipation- all due to lack of moisture or lubrication. They are very sensitive to low levels of humidity. Sea cucumber, cheese, goat milk, peas and pears may wet their whistles.
10. **Special Constitution type** individuals usually have inborn weaknesses. They are very sensitive to drugs, food, smells, pollen or other environmental exposures or toxins. They often suffer from



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nasal congestion, sneezing, runny nose, panting, wheals, hives, itchiness, and may have purple spots or patches under the skin. Health problems among these individuals are drug reactions, hay fever, eczema and allergies. They respond poorly to external influences and their health problems may be induced by season changes. Special combinations of medicinal mushrooms, herbs, and carefully selected foods can help these become less reactive.

In planning a balanced TCVM diet, it is necessary to mix different flavors and energies according to the individual's needs. It should be emphasized that, in reality, most animals have a mixed physical constitution, such as cold and damp, or hot or cold and Qi deficient; therefore, it is not always easy to classify an animal, as more than one type of constitution may be present. And the foods mentioned above, as examples only, are not always appropriate for every animal of the constitutional type. Studying Traditional Chinese Medicine Food Therapy and consulting with a veterinarian trained in this field are advisable to avoid inappropriate combinations of foods. And food sensitivities or allergies can negate the benefits of even the best designed food therapy diet. Testing for these can make designing diets so much easier on the allergic individual, avoiding trial and error.

Properly balanced TCVM diets can be designed using commercial foods; there are diets available that incorporate these concepts and offer multiple combinations of ingredients to meet the needs of different constitutions. Homemade diets can be even more specific, but also must meet the minimum daily requirements for energy, proteins, vitamins, minerals, fats and fiber. The **best** diet is a **well-balanced** homemade diet made with fresh foods; the **worst** diet is a **poorly-balanced** homemade diet.

Embracing Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical Food Therapy and dietary advice is a process, an evolution to a more advanced and intricately balanced diet that can dramatically improve the health and well-being of all animals.

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