

# LIFE'S NEWS: A NEWSLETTER ABOUT CHINESE MEDICINE FOR WOMEN



FALL, 2007 ISSUE 4

LIFE'S NEWS IS A NEWSLETTER FROM LIFE HEALING LIFE & FERTILE GROUND CHINESE MEDICINE CLINICS IN MINNEAPOLIS, MN SPECIALIZING IN WOMEN'S HEALTH & FERTILITY. IT IS WRITTEN BY NICOLE LANGE & KARA YORKHALL. WE HOPE YOU ENJOY IT!

## WHAT THE NUMBERS WON'T TELL YOU

### The 1-2-3s of Numbers, Fertility and Health

by Nicole Lange Lic.Ac. MA.OM. Dipl.Om.

Any woman who is struggling with fertility is likely to have dozens of numbers on her mind: bbt temps, sperm counts, follicle counts, uterine lining, estrogen, FSH, HCG, dosages of medications, age, numbers of cells, percents of morphology, success rates for clinics, success rates for procedures, days till ovulation, days till the next test...the list could go on and on.

Unfortunately, all too often these numbers become an identity for what a woman believes is her future. I cannot say how often I've heard a woman summarize her situation by saying something like:

"Well, my FSH is 30."

"But my luteal phase is only 8 days long."

"The numbers aren't doubling."

"I've got a 10% chance with my own eggs."

These statements seem like simple facts, but they often signify so much more: I'm afraid, I'm too old, I've waited too long, There's something wrong with me, There's nothing I can do, I'm waiting to have a miscarriage, My heart is breaking, I don't think I'll ever be a mother. Somehow, in some clinical way, the numbers make it easier to say.

While this sort of jargon may be routine in Western medicine, it is often not helpful from a Chinese medical perspective. Here's why:

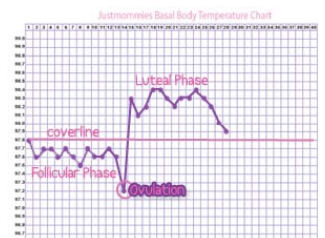


**1. Numbers change:** Although Western medicine will tell you that you are only getting older (and imply you will only be worse off the longer you wait) this simply is not true. FSH can be high one month then low the next for many reasons. BBT charts can be erratic and anovulatory one month and steady and

biphasic six months later. With Chinese medicine and a holistic view it is easy to see why. Acupuncture, herbs, eating well, decreasing stress, breathing, in short, getting more balanced will always improve the numbers! Even FSH over 100 has been known to reduce and lead to a subsequent pregnancy with Chinese medicine.

**2. Numbers can be misleading:** Although numbers can provide a general guideline for what is ideal or "the norm," they are by no means the bottom line. It may be ideal to have more follicles in an IVF cycle, but many cycles are successful despite having fewer follicles and many cycles do not result in a confirmed pregnancy despite having high numbers of follicles.

Pregnancy tests are another great example of misleading numbers, it may be "the norm" for HCG (the "pregnancy hormone") to double every 48-72 hours, but in 15% of normal pregnancies it does NOT!



**3. There is so much more to health and fertility than the numbers:** One of my greatest challenges as a Chinese medical practitioner is getting patients to let go of the numbers and listen to what their body is telling them. When you follow your body's wisdom instead of a book, test, doctor's order, or advice column you are much more likely to be on the right track.

A woman in her 40s might listen to her body and say, "well, I feel good, my energy is good, digestion is fine, I sleep well, go on walks, have little to no PMS, and my emotions are even." With all this information, her age is just a number and she can know she is fertile. On the other hand, a woman in her 20s might listen to her body and know she is very out of balance. She may feel anxious and nauseated, tired all the time, irritable with PMS, not sleep well, and have chronic migraines. Despite her age she might know that she needs to do some work to improve her fertility.

So, the next time you want to focus on just one number, ask yourself, what does that number *really* mean to me? Be honest with your emotions and express them. Check in with yourself and see how you are feeling overall (does it match the number or not?) Remind yourself that numbers can be misleading, and know that numbers can change. Then, take a step back, look at the big picture and let those numbers go!

### FIVE THOUGHTS FOR LIVING

These five thoughts are some of our favorites from a regular feature in Body+Soul magazine.

1. Every interaction has an emotional impact. Handle each one with *awareness*.
2. Don't rush *positive change*. The best kind comes gradually.
3. Simply *being present* is often the most valuable gift you can give.
4. Learn to *mother* yourself.
5. Food has the power to transform. Choose yours *intentionally*.



From the January-August Body+Soul magazines  
By: Donna Garlough and Terri Trespicio

### LIFE'S CHANGES...

You may have noticed some small changes in this issue of Life's News. These changes come as Life's News expands to welcome a new writer - Kara Yorkhall. Nicole is glad to have her on board and sharing in her vision of holistic fertility and women's care in the Twin Cities.

### A GREETING FROM KARA

I'd like to share a little bit about the path that has led me to collaborate with Nicole in the areas of women's health and fertility. Graduating from Northwestern Health Sciences University with a Master's Degree in Oriental Medicine was just the final step of this process. As a child, growing up on a farm, I developed a profound appreciation for the natural cycles of birth and death, of planting, growing, and harvesting. As an Environmental Studies major at Oberlin College my understanding of the importance of living in harmony with the earth grew deeper still. During this time I had the opportunity to live with and attend births with the traditional midwife of a small fishing village in India. This life-changing experience led me to train as a doula, and to begin assisting women and families during pregnancy, labor, and the postpartum period. Later I put down roots in the Midwest, and developed this connection further as the manager of an organic vegetable farm. As a Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner it was a natural choice for me to specialize in women's health and fertility.

I knew instinctively as a child, and now know with keen awareness as an adult that the cycles of my own life and growth are inseparable from those of the natural world. I know in the deepest part of me that we are meant to flourish in this life—to live big, bountiful, abundant lives; to grow, change, and learn; to prepare, to sow, and to reap. Life's journey takes us through many stages like the seasons of the year, and each stage needs a special kind of support, planning, and care. At Fertile Ground we aspire to help you nourish your connection to your true self, and to help you see your health from a new perspective. With thoughtful care and a clear understanding of what is needed, a farmer can transform even the most depleted soil into a fruitful, abundant garden. This is the same approach that Traditional Chinese Medicine takes to healing the body.

At Fertile Ground, you will be a full partner in your healing process. You will be nurtured, guided, and welcomed at every turn to tune in to what is true and right for you. You will come with questions and concerns about your current health issues, and you will leave with the tools to take charge of your well being for a lifetime. Your current health concerns will become fertile ground for new discoveries about how you work, and for new strategies to build and maintain extraordinary vibrant health through all of your life's changes.

## AUTUMN: RETURNING TO STILLNESS

by Nicole Lange Lic.Ac. MA.OM. Dipl.Om.

Much of Chinese medical theory was established through careful observation of the natural world. An important concept is the idea of living in balance with the seasons. When you shift along and live in harmony with the seasons you promote good health & prevent illness. Here are some suggestions for living in harmony with autumn.



**Follow Mother Nature's lead:** In autumn the hot and energizing energy of summer begins to transform into the cold and quiet energy of winter. Be mindful of this transformation and shift your own energy similarly. Go to bed a little earlier, regroup, conserve more energy for the upcoming months, take walks and admire the colors, stay warm and start to shift from doing to being.

**Eat nourishing foods to prepare for winter:** Fall is an amazing season for food therapy. Enjoy seasonal foods like squash, cabbage, apples, nuts, cranberries and high quality meats and shift your cooking methods to include slow cooking, soups and roasting. Hot cereals or soups for breakfast are a great way to start the day.

**Beware of dampness in late summer and dryness in early winter:** Autumn brings interesting juxtapositions in humidity. From the rainy, hot and humid end of summer to the dry days of autumn and indoor heat. Avoid sugar, excess dairy and greasy foods in late summer and add more healthy oils like nuts, avocados and olive oil in the fall to avoid seasonal health concerns like UTIs, sinus infections and dry skin and coughs.

## FALL RECIPE: GINGER SQUASH SOUP

*This delicious soup is the perfect "comfort food". Brenda Langton, owner of local restaurants Cafe Brenda and Spoon River, recommends experimenting with the many different winter squash varieties to find the balance of richness and sweetness that best suits your taste.*



1 medium butternut or buttercup squash  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 medium yellow onion, chopped  
3 tablespoons peeled and chopped ginger root  
2 large cloves garlic, chopped  
4 cups vegetable stock  
3 tablespoons yellow or white miso  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon white pepper  
juice of 1 orange  
1/4 to 1/2 cup half and half (optional)

1. Wash the squash well. Peel and use the peelings in the stock. Chop the squash into 1-inch pieces, discarding the seeds. You should have about 4-5 cups chopped squash.
2. In a large soup kettle, saute the onion, ginger, and garlic in vegetable oil. When the onion softens, add the squash and saute for five more minutes.
3. Add stock and cover pot. Simmer over medium heat for 30-40 minutes.
4. Add miso, salt, pepper and orange juice. Puree soup in a blender in batches, if necessary, until smooth. Add cream. If the soup is too thick, add more soup stock.

Serves 4-6.

From *The Cafe Brenda Cookbook*  
by Brenda Langton and Margaret Stuart

*Kara's note:*

*Instead of adding half and half I like to add a can of either light or regular coconut milk. This adds a rich creamy texture and a delicious coconut flavor. This is a good option if you are trying to avoid eating dairy products.*

*Everyone must take time to sit and watch the leaves turn.*

*Elizabeth Lawrence*

## BEATING COLDS & FLU...WITH FOOD!

by Kara Yorkhall Lic.Ac. MA.OM. Dipl.Om.

It's fall again, and time for windy, rainy days, colder weather, and seasonal changes that can sometimes leave our immune system reeling. What do you do when your nose starts running and you feel that little tickle in your throat? You may feel achy, chilly or be experiencing other signs that get you thinking, "Uh-oh, am I getting a cold?"

Chinese medicine understands acute infections as 'invasions' from the outside. If our defenses are low we are susceptible to invasion by five main pathogens: cold, heat, dampness, dryness, and wind. Each of these factors produces different signs and symptoms in the body.

What we think of as colds and flu are usually a combination of a 'wind' pathogen with a 'cold' or 'heat' pathogen, depending on the symptoms:

Wind Cold	Wind Heat
More Chills	More Fever
Itchy Throat	Sore Throat
Clear thin mucus	Colored thick mucus
More body aches	More dryness/thirst

In the beginning stages, when one is just beginning to feel ill, the body's qi is understood to be "struggling" with the external pathogen at the surface of the body, the skin. This explains why at the beginning of a cold one often feels tension and aches in the neck, shoulders, and head. The general strategy at this point is to try to "release the exterior" or in other words to relax the skin, open the pores, induce sweating, and send the pernicious pathogen packing.

In Chinese Medicine "food is the first medicine." By using simple dietary guidelines when you feel you're coming down with something you can help your immune system do its job faster and more efficiently, and feel better right away. Here are some ideas to help you approach cold care in time tested ways that are pleasing to the palate.



The following suggestions, should be eaten with a basic rice porridge (simply combine about one part rice to 6 parts water and cook until the rice is done and the consistency is like porridge), then add the other ingredients near the end.



**For wind cold:** cook rice into a porridge. Then take 5 whole scallions and grind to a pulp with a few slices of fresh ginger. Add to the rice and simmer for 8-10 minutes, then eat. It should make you sweat, which will help your body kick out the pathogen. Another important cold-care strategy is to make chicken soup with ginger and scallions. The best chicken stock is homemade, from a whole chicken boiled for 8-10 hours or overnight. It's a good idea to keep some of this on hand. Then, boil 3-4 cups of the stock with a generous addition of chopped ginger and scallions. Eat throughout the day. This soup is strengthening for the body, easy to digest, and also helps to release the exterior and kick the cold pathogen. Also for wind cold try fresh ginger tea sweetened with brown sugar or molasses.

**For wind heat:** boil about 2 tablespoons each dried mint leaves and dried chrysanthemum flowers for 5-7 minutes into a tea. Cook rice porridge, add the tea, and eat warm twice a day. Also, try drinking chrysanthemum, peppermint, or mulberry tea on their own.

If you just feel a slight sore throat, especially at night, but have no other wind-cold or wind-heat symptoms, it may simply be due to dryness, which is prevalent during the fall and winter months. In this case try eating cooked pears and ginger with honey. Yummy and moistening!

Remember, when you are sick or getting sick, it is important to eat the right foods to help you get better but it is at least as important to avoid food that will make things worse. At all times, especially the Fall and Winter seasons, avoid cold food and beverages. Also stay away from excessively sweet or rich foods, and fried, heavily processed, or raw foods. In order for the rice porridge recipes to be most effective, minimize (but don't eliminate!) other meals taken during the time of treatment. May the cold months be healthful ones for you this year!

## ASK AN ACUPUNCTURIST

If you have a question you'd like answered please email it to [nicole@lifehealinglife.com](mailto:nicole@lifehealinglife.com)



*Dear Nicole, Are Chinese Herbs Safe to use during pregnancy?  
--Mother doesn't know best*

Dear MDKB,

Thank you for your question, this is something that many women ask about and I'm glad for the opportunity to weigh in on such an important concern. The short answer is... it depends. Like so many aspects of holistic medicine, I'm afraid this question doesn't have a black and white answer. You must decide (with the help of a fully trained herbalist) what is right for you individually. Here are some important things to consider as you decide:

1) Chinese herbs have been used consistently and effectively for thousands of years on millions of women. Many of the formulas that are used for common pregnancy concerns such as threatened miscarriage, morning sickness, and fatigue are literally thousands of years old...and have track records to support them.

2) Although they have been used with consistent safety and efficacy, many Chinese herbs and herbal formulas are not understood from a Western medical perspective. This is an area of concern for some Western physicians.

3) A trained Chinese herbalist knows which herbs are safe and which herbs are too aggressive or potentially dangerous during pregnancy. It is important to acknowledge that there are herbs that should not be used in pregnancy and to stress the need to work with a trained professional.

4) Properly prescribed Chinese herbal formulas are based on whole person signs and symptoms and are highly customized. Because of this, formulas are less likely than Western herbs and Western drugs to cause side effects.

5) If you have several signs and symptoms or particularly serious or severe signs and symptoms it is generally easier for your practitioner to make an accurate holistic diagnosis and herbs are more likely to be effective and helpful. Herbs are generally more advisable in such cases.

6) If you don't have many signs and symptoms or only have mild signs and symptoms it is generally more difficult for your practitioner to make an accurate holistic diagnosis. Milder treatments and lifestyle changes are generally the best route in such cases.

7) Consider whether you have already taken a Chinese formula prior to your pregnancy. If you have, and have had positive results you can feel more confident they are the right herbs for you. If you have not, it may not be worth the risk unless your symptoms warrant it.

8) Because of the mind/body connection in Chinese medicine, the emotional and physical pros and cons should factor into your decision. If a formula makes you feel significantly better, but you are worried about taking it, you must weigh which is greater: the benefits of the herbs or the worry of taking them. Your decision may be different based on the specifics: If herbs stop the bleeding of a potential miscarriage they may be worth taking. If herbs are giving a subtle boost in energy they may not be worth taking ... or vice versa ... only you know what's right for you.

9) Be sure to discuss your concerns with your practitioner. and that he or she is fully trained in Chinese herbal medicine and can attest to the purity of their herbal supplies. Herbs that are distributed by American companies are generally safer than those directly from China. You should also check to be sure a) they do not contain heavy metals or pesticides b) they contain what they say c) they do not contain anything else.

I know that this is not the straight forward answer that you were hoping for, but it is the best information I can give. I hope you find it helpful in making a decision that is right for you--mother really does know best! --Nicole

If you have received this newsletter through a friend and would like to be added to the mailing list or would like more information on treatments or classes please contact Nicole Lange or Kara Yorkhall

The information in this newsletter is based on classical Chinese medical theory and was written by board certified, licensed acupuncturists. It is intended for use as general information and should not replace individual care or be used in place of a medical diagnosis or specific treatment (by an acupuncturist or western medical doctor).

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