

FOODS THAT HEAL

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

PORK:  
MOISTENING  
YOUR INTERNAL  
DESERT

Paul O'Brien



**THIS SOUNDS TOTALLY STEREOTYPICAL, BUT IT'S TRUE:** AS AN IRISHMAN, NOTHING MAKES ME FEEL MORE AT HOME, MORE LOVED, NOR THAT WARM SNUGGLY SENSATION INSIDE THAN THE SMELL AND SOUND OF COOKING BACON. THAT'S HOME TO ME.

I WAS FIVE WHEN I FIRST HEARD WHAT WOULD BECOME FOR ME A MANTRA OF TASTY FOOD:

**“YUM YUM,  
PIG'S BUM!”**

Here in Ireland, we even have TV adverts based on that feeling: An Irishman lonely and stranded in New York wakes to the smell and sound of Irish bacon frying and knows everything will be okay.

I love pork. It's one of the most versatile meats, offering a satisfying bacon breakfast; slices of cured ham with a Ploughman's lunch; or a traditional roast for Sunday dinner.

Oddly enough, this Irish food ancestry blends nicely with my expertise in traditional Chinese medicine. Pork products have a long history in TCM, so I know they're healthy for me too!

In traditional Chinese thought, the Pig or Boar is the last of the 12 animals to appear in the Chinese zodiac. Due to its prosaic nature and love of mucking around, the Pig is heavily associated with the earth. It is also associated with fertility and virility: To bear children in the Year of the Pig is considered to be very fortunate, for they will be happy and honest; Pigs are real salt-of-the-earth people.

Pork not only nourishes my Irish spirit but also my body. As a medicinal food in TCM, pork treats a pathology called "internal dryness". No, it doesn't mean someone is deathly

boring, but rather that their Yin, the fluid element of the body, has become chronically depleted.

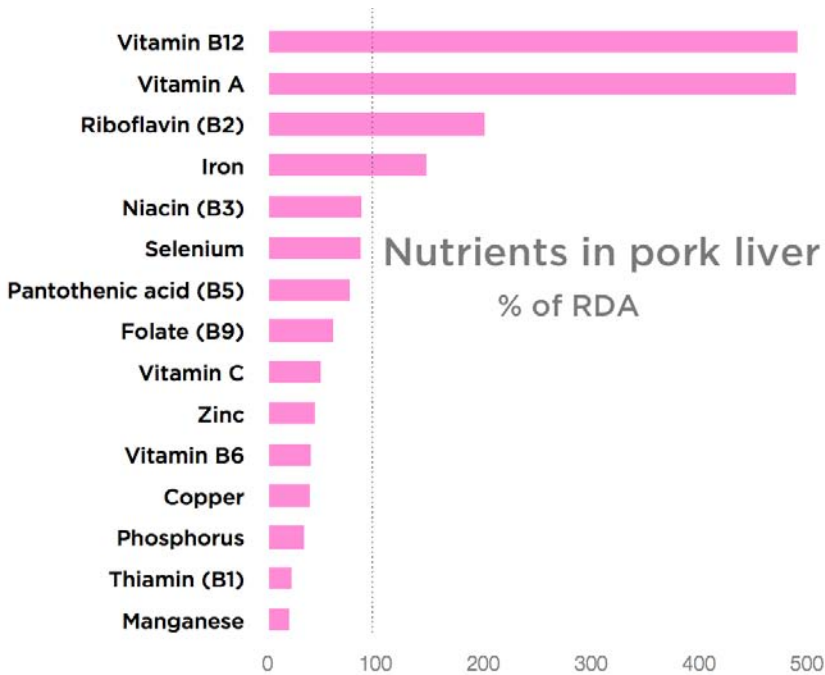
Each organ in the body has both Yin (mental/emotional, fluid) and Yang (physical, solid) properties. An easy way to understand this dynamic is to think of exercise vs. the office.

Exercise burns calories; we can measure that with western medicine. In Chinese medicine, the physical energy to do this is called Yang. If you burn Yang you'll get tired; if you use energy you have less of it. No problem there.

Now... you're at the office, and for the last seven hours you've been sorting paperwork. You haven't moved from your desk. I would guess you'd be bushed after that, right? Yet you haven't expended significant physical energy, so there is no reason to be tired right? Well in Chinese Medicine there is – you've depleted Yin, the energy we use to think and feel.

Ideally these two forces of the body are kept in balance; however that is rarely the case. Humans aren't very good at looking after themselves, it ap-

## FOODS THAT HEAL



pears. Imbalances creep in and symptoms begin to present themselves. In the case of internal dryness, Yin, which is also seen as the fluid, moist element of the body, becomes chronically depleted from over-thinking, too much sexual activity, an overly dry diet, or chronic disease.

As a result, the body becomes dried out. The skin becomes dry because it has lost its moisture, and the heat caused by the dryness can become itchy and red. We are constantly thirsty. Our bowels (the middle of our bodies, or *jiao* in TCM) become sluggish; there is no moisture, so everything becomes hard and compacted. Depending on the organ affected, this can have severe and far-ranging consequences. If the kidneys are affected, there may be problems with the bladder, such as painful strangled urination and impotence. If the lungs are targeted the skin will dry and flake,

and breathing may be laboured by a dry cough. Dry stomach leads to constipation, ulceration, and heartburn; sufferers can be underweight or have diabetes. Finally, if the liver were to be dry, the eyes and blood could be dried out leading to irritation and weakness.

One of the best ways to water this internal desert of the body and to re-hydrate the organs is with pork. Indeed, given the warm, drying nature of much of China's climate, you can perhaps understand the preponderance of pork dishes in the region's cuisine. And as with the cuisine, little goes to waste in TCM.

Each part of the pig, from trotters to brain, can be used for medicinal purposes.

Thus I present you, the daring chef, with some traditional therapeutic Chinese recipes alleged to resolve a number of complaints.

### PORK STOCK

Boil 500 to 1000 g pork, skim off and discard the floating fat. Drink the soup to relieve dry cough and constipation.

Cut up 100 g lean pork (red meats) to boil in water with 100 g Job's Tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*) over low heat for 2 hours. Eat it at meals to moisten the skin; this is considered a good remedy for dry skin.

### MARROW TO MOISTEN

Pork marrow increases Yin and marrow in the body. As such it reduces burning sensations, and cures vaginal discharge in women and seminal emission in men. Pork marrow is an ideal food for the elderly who have lost the precious Yin of life; TCM explains aging – in which we get wrinkly and dried up – as a Yin deficiency.

The Chinese are very fond of using pork bones to make various kinds of soups, because the marrow is good for facilitating growth of bones in children, particularly when mixed with a high level of calcium such as peas, seaweed, spinach and tofu. This use of bone broth is common in many cultures worldwide.

When preparing bone soup, I suggest you add vinegar, fresh ginger and black pepper, since they can make the marrow separate from the bones more easily.

### LIVEN UP YOUR LIFE WITH PORK LIVER

Pork liver is warm, sweet, and bitter; it acts on our liver and is used as a liver and blood tonic. It sharpens the vision and is considered beneficial for night blindness, pink eyes (conjunctivitis), edema, pellagra, and beriberi.

Modern science confirms the value of liver for treating many of these conditions, since several come from vitamin deficiencies. A mere 4 ounces

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(113 g) of pork liver contains nearly 25,000 IU of vitamin A! It also contains several other vitamins – particularly B vitamins – and minerals. (See chart on previous page.)

To resolve edema with congested chest and poor appetite, cut up a pork liver and boil in water; add green onion, ginger, and prickly ash to season before eating. If, on the other hand, the edema presents with difficulty in urination, boil three pork liver tips, 200 g mung beans and 150 g of rice water and eat with your regular meals.

For anemia, boil 70 g of pork liver with 300 g spinach and eat as a side dish with meals.

### **TROT AWAY TO BETTER BLOOD!**

Pork trotter (aka pig feet) was traditionally served to new mothers, as it promotes the secretion of milk for breastfeeding, smoothes muscles, counteracts cold, and reduces heat in the body. It also was alleged to heal carbuncles and detoxify the body. Pork trotter and pork skin have similar effects in TCM; both are full of protein and fat and contain animal colloid.

Hemophilia, nosebleeds, bleeding from gums, and purpura: boil a piece of pork skin or trotter with 10-15 red dates until the dates are extremely soft; this was consumed once a day with food.

Anemia due to blood loss, bleeding or haemorrhoids: boil 60-90 g of pork skin in water with a little rice wine over low heat until it becomes very

soft. Add a teaspoon of brown sugar. (I definitely recommend the sugar.)

For new mums looking to promote milk secretion: boil a pork trotter in water until water is reduced by half; drink this stock daily. Another recipe suggests that boiling 1-2 trotters plus 100 g peanuts, then seasoning with salt, tasted better and was stronger in its action.

### **IT TAKES STONES TO TRY THESE RECIPES**

Pork gallbladder was revered for healing swelling, relieving pain, counteracting toxins, removing damp from the body, clearing the heart, cooling the liver, sharpening vision, and inducing bowel movement. You can see why they liked it so much.

An old recipe to “cure” hepatitis and diarrhea involved squeezing bile from pork gallbladder and then boiling or steaming it with 40 g honey, then consuming this mixture once a day. A similar recipe, without the honey, was prescribed for jaundice.

For hypertension, mix 130 g of bile with 5 g of mung bean and grind into powder; take 6 g powder twice daily. Alternatively, you could squeeze black soya beans into the gallbladder till full. Steam until cooked and dry in the sun. Once that was done, pop 20-30 beans daily.

### **PANICKED OVER THE PANCREAS?**

Pork pancreas traditionally heals tuberculosis with cough when cooked

with red dates and wine, and cures weakness and dizziness. To sort out a cough, cut up the pork pancreas into thin slices and then boil it with vinegar, eating with your meals.

To cure vitiligo, the skin condition that the late Michael Jackson made famous, soak pork pancreas in wine for an hour, then steam it; consume daily for up to ten days but no more than that.

Finally, a favourite of mine, an old diabetes treatment: Soak a fresh pork pancreas in boiling water until half cooked, then season it with soy sauce. Or you could boil a pork pancreas with 40 g of corn silk. Drink the liquid and eat the pancreas once a day for seven days. The pancreas, of course, produces insulin, which is the hormone that Type 1 diabetics cannot produce.

Finally, if you suffer from lumbago (low back pain), edema, seminal emission, night sweat, and/or age-related deafness, nosh on a pork kidney.

A word of caution: many pork preparations can be too salty and thus have a negative effect on the kidneys. If you find yourself apathetic, unmotivated and/or suffering low back pain, bladder difficulties or problems in the bedroom, I'd give salty pork a miss. The same is true if you suffer from damp conditions, as the cooling nature of pork may make you wet and boggy internally. (See my previous article in *Spezzatino* Vol. 8, Coffee, for more information on dampness.)