



T O W A R D S
R E S I L I E N C E

A MANUAL IN
SUPPORT OF THE
IMMUNE SYSTEM

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Due to concerns about the lack of information on diet provided to those self-isolating during the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to compile a manual including recipes in support of the immune system, and suggestions for promoting wellbeing. Fascinated by healing systems from around the world, and noticing their intersection, I have chosen to draw upon time-tested health remedies from Eastern Europe (where I'm from), and alternative therapeutic systems such as Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Put together over two weeks, all the food featured here was prepared and photographed in my house to demonstrate how to best enhance our health, and eat seasonally. Learning how to build a strong immune system is key to general health and wellbeing - and not only during times of crisis. I hope this resource will help to alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that we are all facing.

As a socially-engaged artist, my projects often interrogate social inequalities based on race, class, and gender, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the systemic failings that disproportionately affect underserved minorities, including people of colour. The overwhelming and destabilising threat of COVID-19 is a direct outcome of industrial agriculture's disastrous effects on land and humans - and enabled by neoliberal governments and corporations' pursuit of economic growth.

In this manual, I draw parallels between the state of the planet during the Anthropocene, and the equivalent effects on our bodies. The pandemic highlights the necessity of remaining critical and aware of the multiple factors that dictate our lives, and looking beyond the personal comfort zone.

I am an artist, not a healer, and while spending time at home under lockdown, I am reconsidering my practice, and how best to use it in these extraordinary circumstances.

INTRO

During the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals worldwide have struggled due to risk-averse governments uninterested in public health investment, leaving nurses, doctors, cleaners, and other key workers overstretched, unprotected, and unable to cope with the severity of the crisis.

In the UK, ten years of austerity cuts have contributed to the current desperate state of the National Health Service (NHS): at breaking point even before the pandemic, and now shown to be lacking not only protective gear and essential equipment (consciously not ordered by the government even as doctors begged for them), but of staff members - numerous European workers having fled once Brexit negotiations revealed how little their contributions were valued.

While pandemics are impossible to predict, governments' roles in prioritising health care and education should include:

- Allocating sufficient crisis funding (even if it may not be used while in power)
- Investing in research and development, so that pathogens can be studied over long periods
- Creating safe working environments for key workers who put their lives at risk, day in and day out (including sufficient remuneration)
- Supporting new technologies that may supply innovative methods of testing populations (such as doing so at [airports](#), providing immediate results)
- Creating educational platforms that promote basic health knowledge, and which are accessible to all, regardless of age, sex, race, class, or faith.

Even an untrained eye will notice how little of the above is being addressed, even in 'developed' countries. Nor are governments committing to invest in long-term solutions; preparedness is costly and not profitable for corporate business, which all too often sets the political agenda.

The pandemic is a starting point, from which it is possible to expose the factors that underlie it. Identifying the root cause rather than treating the symptoms is a key principle in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); most of the following recipes work on this basis. The interlocking ecosystems of our world are similar to those within our bodies, in that each system depends on others to survive or thrive; when one element weakens, ripple effects destabilise the others.

LAND

Since the mid twentieth century, industrial agriculture - ostensibly the only solution for supporting an ever-growing population - has become responsible for ecological devastation, human health catastrophes, and widening social inequalities. Some of its most significant impacts include:

- Massive deforestation to provide land for crops primarily used as animal feed, biofuels, or junk food ingredients
- Routine usage of pesticides and herbicides, altering the natural growth and development of plants and killing microbial life beneficial to the soil system, as a result of which, [the UK has around 100 viable harvests remaining](#)
- Treatment of animals as disposable assets: tortured (caged, overcrowded), raped (forcibly artificially inseminated to produce milk and eggs year-round), dosed with hormones and antibiotics causing not only various cancers, but with the knock-on effect of human resistance to antibiotics via animal consumption, and ultimately killed
- Treatment of humans as disposable assets (expanded below)
- Disastrous reduction of biodiversity due to global habitat loss - particularly affecting the arthropods on which the food chain rests
- Introduction of monocultures of predominantly wheat, maize, and soy crops leading to further soil depletion and erosion - climate change relates to the top soil crisis
- Water pollution through animal waste leaking, resulting in algal blooms and nitrate contamination, impacting drinking water, and marine and aquatic ecology

Fruit and vegetables were previously farmed according to regional traditions and customs, and harvested seasonally; today, we have seemingly revolutionised food production. With aesthetic considerations prioritised, all industrially-farmed vegetables and fruit are now identical in size, shape, and colour, and have convinced many of us that produce covered in soil is an aberration. These “edible food-like substances”, as Michael Pollan refers to them in *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, are harvested 12 times a year, (instead of once or twice, commonly in the West) and lack the rich flavours of their organic counterparts.

‘Ugly’ produce falling short of industry standards is thrown away, meaning that in spite of the amount of food produced, much is paradoxically never consumed; [up to 40% of food is wasted in the UK](#). Supermarkets’ advertising strategies play a significant role in influencing individual consumption patterns; the impression of everlasting abundance, catering to diverse palates, has caused a fundamental misunderstanding of what can grow seasonally and regionally. This cornucopia, coupled with ‘2 for 1’ or other ‘affordable’ deals, has also created the illusion of a reality we cannot sustain. By comparison, the produce at farmers’ markets, though of a higher quality, nevertheless starkly illustrates the realities of non-industrial farming: seasonal availability, lower yields, and more directly weather-dependent goods.

Even with suitable landcare, modern diets are impacted negatively by the decline of crop diversity over the past 50 years; [cultivation of regional crops has diminished](#), leading to a more homogenous global use of a small number of crops. If you do a quick count, you’ll notice that we consume around 30 plant species: cucumbers, potatoes,

various types of squash etc. People on the Okinawan slands in Japan grew at least 230.

And monoculture crops are particularly vulnerable to infestation, drought, disease, or flooding. The potato blight which began the Great Famine in Ireland between 1845 and 1849, during which an estimated one million people died and another million were displaced (a situation exacerbated by English foreign policy), shows the possible tragic effects of single-crop dependence.

On a micro scale, consequences for our digestive systems are also cause for concern. The gut microbiome (microscopic bacteria, viruses, and fungi living in the cecum, a pocket of the large intestine) is increasingly seen as instrumental to the immune system, and requires a diverse flora to combat disease-causing bacteria or other substances. It is no coincidence that the prevalence of food allergies and intolerances, and of digestive illnesses such as irritable bowel syndrome or leaky gut (permeation of toxins through the intestinal wall) continue to increase. Industrial agriculture’s harmful [glyphosate usage](#) is linked to various wheat intolerances, as is inappropriate storage of grains: the UK’s damp climate and cloudy summers make wheat difficult to dry, leading to moulds which, when ingested, cause inflammation in our bodies. The indigenous [Tanzanian Hadza](#), one of the last remaining populations in Africa who still survive as hunter-gatherers - the way of life that has characterised at least 90% of human history - live off around 600 species of plants and animals. In an [analysis of the seasonal diversity in their gut microbiome](#), researchers established that the microbiome of industrial populations has decreased an astonishing amount by comparison.

PEOPLE

Unfortunately, the single most significant purchase-motivator is affordability. Complaints about farmers' markets and organic produce being too expensive, and therefore favouring the economically stable, are neverending. If a fresh raspberry punnet available year-round in Tesco or Sainsbury's, grown in countries as distant as Chile, Peru, or Kenya, costs £2.00 - when a locally-grown one at a summer farmers' market is only 50 pence more - how much are the foreign workers earning, excluding the air miles?

This is where respect and fairness come in. For decades, those employed as food labourers have worked in appalling conditions, including exposure to harmful chemicals, shifts often paid according to production - amount harvested - rather than hours worked (meaning no guaranteed earning by the end of the day, and minimal or nonexistent social security, and vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking).

Typically, only [around 5% of citizens tend to be involved in agriculture](#) in economically-developed countries, compared to almost 70% of the population in poorer ones. When the UK doesn't import its food from abroad (where those labourers are at the mercy of their own governments), it instead relies on immigrants, even currently putting their lives at risk to ['pick for Britain'](#). These are the same immigrants demonised by the media, and scapegoated to justify Brexit; the same immigrants everyone has been taught to hate. Demanding that our food be cheap on these terms reflects how little we value the people who are keeping the system functioning.

Channel 4's [The Romanians Are Coming](#) warned that an entire population was on the way to steal all UK jobs and benefits, possibly simultaneously. This expectation is apparently shared by those who voted against EU nurses, construction workers, or other 'low-skilled' labourers yet who are perfectly keen to have those same people prevent this year's harvest from going to waste. Curious that these nationalists won't dirty their own hands for Great British produce. After all Eastern European nationals were sent home when the lockdown began, just a few weeks later, a Romanian workforce was flown back in, specifically for the vital task of picking asparagus. Made possible by governmental agreements between Britain and Romania, this arrangement emphasised both the disposability of one demographic's labourers, and the complicity allowing corrupt governments to manipulate populations at the intersection between exploitation and lack of opportunities.

As patronising as I consider the [Clap for Our Carers](#) campaign (other countries extend their thanks by investing in health care), I'm not aware of any equivalent national gestures of gratitude for key workers of other types, such as food labourers, cleaners, delivery people, or socially-engaged volunteers. Our judgemental attitudes towards those in supposedly low-skilled employment are too entrenched. The classism of our ostensibly 'post-class' system teaches that manual labour is shameful. As such, we are doing our best to escape from land practices, instead climbing the social ladder into antiseptic, air-conditioned skyscrapers insulated from the world at large. May we find better ways to recognise these people's crucial social contribution, beyond immediate financial remuneration - if such a thing is ever made possible.

VIRUSES

Issues of social justice are closely linked to the success of those in charge in demonising the most vulnerable: those in minimum or lower-than-minimum wage labour; those not well enough to work; immigrants; the differently-abled. In short, those not benefiting from the criminal neoliberal system are now blamed for its collapse.

The use of poorer countries' land by companies from the Global North markets, continue to decimate ancient virgin forests, from the Carpathians to the tropics. As well as immediate habitat loss, this establishment of agricultural land, or use of wood for furniture (see IKEA) unleashes unknown-to-science pathogens previously managed by forest ecologies. According to evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace, this cause and effect is overlooked: ["When the new outbreaks spring up, governments, the media, and even most of the medical establishment are so focused on each separate emergency that they dismiss the structural causes that are driving multiple marginalized pathogens into sudden global celebrity, one after the other."](#)

Humans have long known how to take from nature, but not how to offer any replenishment. The ever-expanding aviation industry (that pays no taxes in spite of its injurious effects on the planet) facilitates our relentless movement around the world. Air pollution (caused in large part by agri-business) weakens our respiratory systems ([the regions hit hardest](#) by COVID-19 show similarly [high pollution levels](#)), and pollutant particles [become vehicles for pathogens](#). As a result, these viruses have seven billion potential hosts, making a rapid spread inevitable. Is it finally a good time to reconsider those European city-breaks?

The bats from which COVID-19 likely jumped to humans may well have been starving, since the insects they survive on have been decimated by the same pesticides ruining our health. Wild species across all groups - birds, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, fish, crustaceans - are dying out, often due to habitat destruction meaning food is no longer available. This in turn pushes animal populations into closer quarters with humanity. The result: diseases pass from animals to humans; [zoonotic diseases](#) of this kind include Ebola, Zika, SARS, MERS, and bird flu, and usually emerge from livestock farming. Additionally, in the USA alone fungal disease [white-nose syndrome](#) has caused a decline of over 90% in certain bat species since 2007. [Another, *Bd \(Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis\)*](#), is responsible for the current worldwide amphibian "apocalypse", which not only kills, but renders entire species extinct.

Extraction of resources and disruption of ecosystems has created optimal conditions for transmission of disease. Vaccines may save lives (and face), but without addressing root causes and stopping their perpetuation, we are endangering ourselves in the face of continued threats. Rises in temperature resulting from climate change will exacerbate the situation as mosquito species expand their range, spreading northwards from the Equator, carrying diseases to unprepared regions. The health of both our species and our planet cannot be addressed without robust long-term planning and investment, without rewilding schemes protecting and encouraging diversity, and measures protecting workers from exploitation. To achieve ecological equity and intersectional sustainability, we must steer away from our desire for immediate effects, and instead consider our decisions' impacts upon [the unborn seventh generation](#).

You may be aware of the [living root bridges](#) in Meghalaya, India: one of the world's most innovative examples of responsive, resilient, and thoughtful infrastructure, developed by the indigenous Khasi and Jaintia peoples. Fig trees planted on both riverbanks are trained across for thirty years until they eventually connect, creating a load-bearing bridge. Not only does this enable river-crossing, it can withstand monsoon rains and flooding (in a way conventional structures would be unable to), and increases in strength over time. Having escaped the strictures of colonialism because of the area's isolation, the Khasi have developed a system of close collaboration with nature by observing its cycles, and planning for a future they may not individually live to see. These bridges live for hundreds of years, testament to an awareness of interdependence between the human and natural worlds.

Nature functions as a circular economy, wasting nothing and creating conditions conducive to the perpetuation of life. If we start to value each species' contribution to planetary sustainability, and come to see ourselves as equal, not superior, we may start our path to an environmentally regenerative future. But putting these intentions into practise requires that we listen; with listening as a foundational platform for change, we may understand each other better, and be able to ensure that people and environments are not disenfranchised in the name of profit.

Yet change ought not be predicated solely around headline news: Amazon shouldn't be boycotted only during the pandemic, as if it wasn't already public knowledge that this company forces its workforce [to wear bracelets that measure their productivity](#). That next-day delivery is nothing but a gateway to corporate supremacy. We are not so important that we cannot wait any longer. We need to interrogate all employers' misdemeanors, from [Byron's 'training days'](#) from hell, which handed over visa-less employees to the Home Office, or services like Uber profiteering from individuals' assets (drivers' cars) without offering holiday, sick days, or the security of minimum wage. Under capitalism, we vote with our purchases; make that vote count.

By comparison, numerous inspiring initiatives demonstrate the viability of alternative narratives, by empowering wise choices, and putting care and compassion first: the [Ecological Land Co-op](#), [Community Land Trust Network](#), [Open Food Network](#), [Low Carbon Trust](#), [Platform London](#), [Counterpoints Arts](#), [Art Gene](#), [New Economy Organisers](#), [Women's Environmental Network](#), [Go-op](#), [Amazon Frontlines](#), [Smile Warsaw](#), [Centre for Alternative Technology](#), [Findhorn Foundation](#), [Gaia Foundation](#), [Colectiva Urzica](#), [Greening the Desert](#), [Low Impact](#), [Straw Works](#), [Participatory City](#), [Feedback](#), [Phytology](#), and [Herbalists without Borders](#) represent a tiny cross-section of a worldwide movement that has been developing for decades. Visit [Ethical.net](#) for more.

In Okinawa prefecture, Japan, one of the [Blue Zone](#) regions ("the world's longest-lived cultures"), the population regularly live up to 90 or 100, often without the age-associated illnesses common in the West. They grow their own food, have a very active social life, practice physical exercise, and add money to a collective fund that is distributed to each one of the members every month, so that no-one is out of pocket. They claim longevity is linked to their heightened appreciation of nature, and of each other,

reminding me of Romanian saying "If you want to eat well, put food in your friend's stomach". By relying on their immediate community, Okinawans have achieved what the Western world seems to be seeking: connection, purpose, health, and wellbeing.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, we all aim to belong - yet the UK and USA have failed miserably to provide this during the pandemic. Instead, their attitudes towards the elderly and the immuno-compromised betrayed deep-seated beliefs about who is perceived as worthy of survival, and who isn't. Neoliberalism's effects on individuals' judgements and actions have never been more transparent. In the UK, Mutual Aid groups have been vital in the current circumstances, yet conversely a trip outside is a stark reminder of those indifferent about putting others' lives in danger by not following physical distancing guidelines. Thirty years of rampant capitalism in Romania has yet to obliterate the desire to help others live better; a dynamic that led to the proverbial cup of flour or sugar making the rounds of its blocks, during the worst of the Communist regime. In societies where survival is dependent on others' wellbeing, sharing becomes a norm, also a founding principle in longevity cultures.

We have been told that we are in an awful economic recession. But the informal (i.e. unacknowledged) economy of care - which sustains the world - has not stopped. In fact, women everywhere are working tirelessly to get children or loved ones washed, fed, and educated, while often also having to perform as well as men in their paid jobs. We do not need to be reminded of the [entrenchment of the patriarchal system](#), but perhaps this is an opportunity for men to pay attention too.

Due to our imposed distance from day-to-day norms, rhetoric suggests that we have started to value nature more, and notice the cracks in the system. There is no better time to pressure elected officials to put their money where their mouth should be, by demanding cleaner air, green energy, and divestment from fossil fuels; support for people with disabilities, as well as for workers of all kinds, and small, ethical businesses; and no bailouts for corporations.

Spread the word, complain, make a fuss, make noise, connect with others, meet the neighbours, care for one another, engage digitally and non-digitally. Let us all consider how we may deploy our skills in the service of others.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

This time last year, at a Traditional Chinese Medicine course I started attending by chance, the facilitator mentioned that rice doesn't spike your glycemic index, as it is widely believed in the West. Instead, if consumed with ginger or warming spices (as it traditionally has been in South and East Asia), it can stabilise blood sugar levels. This small fact demonstrates one of the deeper implications of colonialism: that a system built on violence, which stole land, lives, goods, and natural resources, did so without gaining an understanding of the values and belief systems of the cultures it oppressed.

Dominant Western media and practices have played a crucial role in promoting its ideal society: individualistic, competitive, class-stratified, and anthropocentric. We have been disconnected from nature, from each other, and ultimately from ourselves. Yet we are at a pivotal moment of shifting perspectives. Colonial organisation of knowledge has uprooted us; by observing, listening, and researching, we may find other paths for sustaining ourselves in ways that are in sync with the natural world, not in opposition to it.

Before the lockdown was made official, people stormed into supermarkets, harassing workers, and stockpiled on pasta, tinned tomatoes, and frozen pizza. Putting aside the egocentricity of hoarding at the expense of all other consumers (and putting the vulnerable at risk), these specific culinary choices made me question understanding of nutrition, especially in relation to health.

When I first started learning about TCM, I was struck by its similarities to Romanian health remedies' principles picked up from my mother. In my immediate circle of international female friends, all have used natural methods of healing aches and pains learnt from their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or neighbours. As we more generally lose touch with the knowledge and philosophy underpinning our ancestors' use of food, the benefits of natural healing have become replaced by the prevalence and the regulation of ingredients in manufactured drugs.

Traditional Chinese Medicine is a branch of traditional medicine that has developed over thousands of years in China, focusing on balancing the body and the mind, and on preventing disease rather than curing it. Medical diagnoses are made only after a thorough examination of patients' lifestyle choices, stress levels, eating habits, etc. Unlike Western medicine, it doesn't aim to 'fix' what is broken, but rather to identify the root cause so that the symptoms no longer return. Over centuries, China has also built empirical records of the occurrence and treatment of viral diseases (most strains of influenza and hepatitis originated there). Given the unabashed hatred and racism directed towards China since the pandemic began, I also believe it is a crucial time to offer support, and/or promote its cultural legacy across diverse platforms.

My intentions are not to appropriate (understanding TCM takes a lifetime, and I am certainly only a novice), but to combine some of its basic principles of wellbeing with what I have learned in Romania. Tailoring these elements has drastically improved my overall health and quality of life; I hope some of these recipes will be beneficial, and spark interest in individual research.



BUILDING NATURAL IMMUNITY

The immune system is a complex network of organs, tissues, and cells that includes the lymph nodes, thymus, lungs, bone marrow, spleen, liver, and gut. As in the interdependent systems of the nature world, if one organ becomes compromised, it affects the entire body. Therefore, the recipes in this book aim to soothe and nurture different parts of ourselves, cumulatively benefiting our whole system.

However, immunity hinges on so many elements that food alone will not guarantee virus prevention or recovery. J. E. Williams co-founded the Ecology Medical Clinic, one of the first integrative medical centres in the United States focusing on allergies, chemical and food sensitivities, and chronic fatigue. In [Viral Immunity](#), he advocates for building and immune-enhancing lifestyle in several holistic ways:

Stress

The influence of the mind on the body is no longer disregarded by Western medicine; our fast-paced modern lives are weakening our immune systems through overwhelming stress factors (e.g. financial insecurity; multiple jobs; demanding managers; lack of free time; street-noise levels). Identifying triggers is crucial. Life during lockdown has proven that slowing down is possible, and that time in nature, with loved ones, and self-care for our bodies and mental health should be prioritised in the future.

Fear

The reaction to the last few years' politics - with major campaigns like Brexit and the drive to 'make America great again' vilifying immigrants and leveraging panic - is again at the forefront. The amygdala, a part of the brain involved in responding to fear, assesses possible threats and stores fear memories. If we do not understand something, our primal response is fear. This instinctive reaction can be reduced by making time for research, enquiry, and the disruption of habitual ways of thinking. Filtering out fearmongering right-wing newspapers or television shows will similarly enable empowering critical and affirmative thinking.

Exercise

Too much or too little can be equally stressful. Tai chi and haṭha yoga are considered essential for connecting the body and the mind. By enabling practitioners to look outward rather than inward, and adapt to their environment, tai chi improves cognitive abilities, and helps manage stress-related anxiety by integrating relaxation and stretching into its movements. It improves blood circulation, strengthens the body, increases flexibility, and in older people reduces the risk and fear of falling by improving mobility and coordination. Tai chi is linked with greater longevity, and helps achieve a conscious awareness of the present moment. Nurses in Wuhan, China, have been using [tai chi in hospitals](#) to help patients gain energy, and speed up recovery.

Unlike tai chi, haṭha yoga looks inward, and aims to prepare the body for higher possibilities by focusing on breathing and meditation techniques. In Sanskrit, "haṭha" means "force", and practitioners can expect to be challenged to work against their own limitations. Twists and stretches stimulate the lymphatic system, aiding removal of toxins, while breath-control improves oxygenation and reduces stress levels.

Oxygenation is a serious issue for COVID-19 patients, and regular practice, enabling the discovery of specific breathing techniques that suit your body's abilities, may help to counter the anxiety caused by shortness of breath.

Equally beneficial is non-strenuous exercise such as aerobic exercise, swimming, cycling, non-intensive weights - but rest is crucial; give your body time to reset after sessions. Exercise outside is recommended between 5 and 7am, when air pollution is at its lowest (though this may raise safety concerns, particularly for women); avoid running at midday, when pollution peaks.

Hydration

We are primarily made up of water, which among other things enables the [production of saliva, regulation of body temperature through sweating, reproduction of bodily cells, lubrication of joints, and the delivery of oxygen around the body](#); no wonder we require between two to three litres a day. Water in plastic bottles contains carcinogenic particles (and is very bad for the planet due to carbon its transportation's carbon footprint), while tap water may contain various man-made chemicals like lead (leaked through corrosion of pipes) and chlorine ([associated with memory loss and impaired balance](#)) that could damage your health. If you don't have a water filter, biochemist Eugen Giurgiu suggests a low-tech solution: squeezing half a lemon into a two-litre jug of water, and leaving it overnight to purify harmful toxins. Drink this during the day, but not after 24 hours.

Sleep

Too little sleep associated to drowsiness, low interest in exercise, depression, irritability, anxiety, and reduced ability to problem-solve. Aim for eight hours a night, avoid looking at screens (TV, laptops, mobiles) from around two hours before going to bed, refrain from using sleeping pills, and try to relax yourself with lavender or chamomile tea.



HEALING FOODS

Compiled from various sources, the following list contains foods and herbs known to be beneficial to the immune system, broken down into seasonal sections for overall prevention of viruses, as well as general tips for the cold and flu season. Please note that at the time of writing, there are no known natural remedies or herbs to prevent or cure COVID-19.

Don't overload your system by trying to incorporate all of the following simultaneously; use these suggestions step by step, according to your personal circumstances, and always check with a medical professional if you have any doubts.

Eating seasonally can be helpful, so in the case of foods' seasonal availability, assume that this is when they can most effectively be consumed.

MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS

As much as juice bars and yoga studios are involved in gentrification, they have also revived interest in adaptogenic mushrooms. These non-toxic substances, first mentioned as effective treatments in Li Shizhen's 1578 *Compendium of Materia Medica*, can help the body resist physical, chemical, or biological stressors, and have been used for thousands of years in Eastern medicine.

Different types of mushrooms can benefit the brain, immune system, mood, and energy levels, are antioxidant and anti-metastatic (and often used in cancer treatments), and can be easily added to your diet in cooking, or consumed as elixirs, coffees, or shakes. Many species of mushroom have developed complex systems of unique compounds which can have life-enhancing effects for humans. As a result, medicinal mushrooms are an ideal long-term supplement for enhancing the [more-than-70% of immune function that takes place in the microbiome](#). It is important to use high-quality mushrooms, and research suppliers to be sure of not investing in those who may be over-harvesting. Out of 200 to 300 types, only a handful have been studied in the West, including maitake, turkey tail, cordyceps, lion's mane, and reishi.

Reishi, "the queen of mushrooms", is a symbol of longevity and wellbeing, and traditionally reserved for royals' use only. As an [immunomodulator](#), it can create balance in the body, regenerate the liver by removing heavy metals, reduce inflammation and fatigue, improve memory and [protect the brain against age-related diseases](#), and promote the production of both B and T cells, a critical part of the immune system. Reishi can be used in powdered forms, in capsules, and as dried slices in broths and teas.

Chaga, "the 'king of mushrooms'", grows on birch trees in cold environments, and was originally used in Russia and Western Siberia by the indigenous Khanty people. Containing [beta-glucans and polysaccharides](#), it reduces inflammation and blood sugars, improves endurance and strength, especially during the cold months, is rich in vitamin B, and may be useful for allergies and auto-immune conditions. Like reishi, it is

mostly used in powder form.

Unlike chaga and reishi, **shiitake** is widely available, and used in cooking all over the world. Among others, it contains fibre, zinc (linked to healthy skin and hair), vitamins B1, B2, B6, B12, and D2, iron, and calcium, making it an immune-system powerhouse. It can be used in broths, soups or stews, and freezes well; I have included it in several recipes.

ANTIOXIDANTS

Antioxidants help to neutralise the damage caused by free radicals, by working against oxidation. Free radicals arise both within our bodies, and from the environment, with causes ranging from inflammation to alcohol, smoking, pollution, X-rays, and strenuous exercise.

Modern lifestyles make us prey to free radical damage, but the correct vitamin intake can help the body strengthen.

Types of antioxidants:

Vitamin C

The most important antioxidant; squeeze the juice of an orange and a lemon into water and leave overnight for a daily dose. In his book, *Natural Remedies for Fighting Cancer*, Eugen Gurgiu advises adding the juice of one lemon, one orange, and one grapefruit to the same quantity of water with honey, along with citrus peel (organic and unwaxed). Leave in the fridge overnight, and take three teaspoons a day regularly during the flu season. This recipe's anti-infective properties are very powerful due to the mix of vitamin C and the flavonoids found in the peel. Vitamin C is also found in common foods including bell peppers, strawberries, broccoli, tomatoes, cabbage, kale, peas, currants, and parsley.

Vitamin E

Found in seeds, nuts, whole grains, leafy greens, and olive oil.

Carotenoids - found in dark green vegetables, sea algae like spirulina and chlorella, yellow and orange fruit and vegetables such as carrots, sweet potatoes, squash varieties, apricots, peaches, and red fruits like tomatoes and strawberries

Vitamin B2

Found in mushrooms, almonds, pine nuts, broccoli, spinach, brussel sprouts, and raspberries.

Vitamin B6

Found in bananas, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and soybeans.

Vitamin B12

Prevents anaemia, but can only be found naturally in animal products such as beef, eggs, or shellfish like oysters and clams, so vegans will need to take this in the form of supplements.

Selenium

Found in Brazil nuts (three a day is enough for a daily dose), sunflower seeds, whole grains, garlic, and yeast.

Zinc

Found in tofu, pumpkin seeds, black-eyed peas, lentils, chickpeas, and adaptogenic herbs (assist stress)

Berries

Berries contain [phytonutrients](#), are high in fibre, anti-inflammatory, and may improve blood sugar and insulin response, and can be frozen for up to six months for consumption throughout the year. The following types are especially beneficial: elderberries (do not eat raw, only buy the dried ones which require boiling before use), schisandra (fight fatigue, promote a healthy liver, enhance mental clarity), goji berries (protect eyesight, improve anxiety and sleep), and rosehips (help build stronger bones).

ENZYMES

Raw food diets have become increasingly popular in the last decade or so. Consuming enzymes (proteins that act as biological catalysts) is mandatory for our health, and crucial for those fighting or recovering from various cancers. Raw diets evangelise for the consumption of vegetables, fruit, and nuts in raw form, meaning they can be heated only to a maximum of 41°.

I enjoyed a raw diet for several years, however our bodies' susceptibilities mean that extreme approaches are not ultimately supportable. Constitutions vary radically, so certain people may thrive on this diet, while could find that it unintentionally disrupts their constitutional balance.

The best ways to add enzymes to your diet are:

- Seasonal [smoothies](#), a blend of vegetables and fruit - always add seeds and nuts to digest the fruit better, and avoid spiking your Glycemic Index. Do not add ice, and drink these during hotter months.
- Juices (though the fibre is left out if using just fruit, so think carefully how to balance it)
- Seed or nut spreads
- Sprouts and microgreens - packed with nutrients, these contain a [higher concentration of nutrients](#) per calorie than their mature counterparts, and can easily be grown [at home](#).
- Sea vegetable powders such as chlorella and spirulina
- Herbs like comfrey (read about [Charlie Seber, the Tsar of Compost](#), and his inventive

ways of planting comfrey in London), peppermint, thyme, coriander etc. added to cooking, including salads.

HERBS AND OTHER INGREDIENTS WHICH DETOXIFY

Despite the fashionableness of detox plans where people go to great lengths to keep their liver in check, there is no need to perform the overcomplicated and at times unsafe rituals promoted by worldwide influencers. Instead, simply incorporate foodstuffs into your diet which speed up the cleansing process, and remember that though the liver is the primary organ of detoxification, the large intestine, kidneys, lungs, blood and lymphatic system, and connective tissues also play their part.

Use the following to support organ function:

Fruit: Fruit with high water content have a diuretic effect which helps the kidneys eliminate toxins (apart from grapefruit, which inhibits detoxification)

Dark green vegetables: such as kale, chard, spinach, and arugula

Sea vegetables: kombu, nori, kelp, and wakame

Seeds and nuts: in small doses, easily digestible examples such as almonds, linseed, sunflower, pumpkin, hemp, sesame, and chia seeds are an excellent addition to homemade vegetable or fruit drinks

Culinary spices: parsley, sage, thyme, rosemary, and oregano

You may also increase the foods and herbs that support specific organs, such as:

Liver-supportive foods: beets, dandelion, radish, radish sprouts, daikon, and endive.

Liver-supportive herbs: milk thistle, dandelion (teas are the easiest), bupleurum, and chamomile.

Kidney function: plenty of clean water, nettle (as tea or cooked in soup), green tea, watermelon, and carrot juice with parsley.

Additionally, dry skin-brushing with a loofah/brush before taking a bath is especially recommended to stimulate lymph flow. Avoid the toxins in the conventional industrially-manufactured cleaning products around you by substituting them with ingredients like [vinegar and bicarbonate of soda](#). Toxins are present in numerous day-to-day products, removing which will speed up the process of detoxification.

ANTI-INFLAMMATORIES

The body naturally inflames in order to protect itself from injury, illness, or infection. However, chronic (long-term) inflammation without an identifiable cause has been

linked to diabetes, heart disease, and issues as diverse as chronic fatigue and acne. Among the most inflammatory foods are sugar and high-fructose corn syrup; all dairy products except kefir; processed meat; trans fats; cooking oils; alcohol; caffeine; and refined carbohydrates - that is, the cheap supermarket products likely found in a majority of households.

Divestment from these harmful ingredients is crucial to achieving healthiness.

Introducing anti-inflammatory foods into your diet is a simple way of countering chronic inflammation, and some of the below have been proven therapeutic:

BALANCING OMEGA-3 AND OMEGA-6

Modern diets are high in omega-6 (found in cooking oils such as sunflower oil), which a human heart can only resist for an average of 60 years. [The high rate of heart attacks or heart-associated issues](#), caused by fatty build-ups are associated with the consumption of these oils, which must be eliminated from our cooking altogether. Frying has particularly damaging effects, and is also linked to various cancers, putting lower-income individuals at particular risk. A change to high-quality olive or coconut oils, as well as cold-processed nut or seed oils, is urgently needed. Purchase oils in glass bottles where possible, to avoid the harmful petrochemicals found in plastic bottles from seeping into their contents.

To guard against heart disease and improve the immune system, eat foods high in omega-3, including linseed, chia, hemp, walnuts, and purslane ([4mg per gram. compared to 0.89mg in spinach](#)).

Other anti-inflammatory foods include spices like turmeric (often used for arthritis, osteoporosis, and other bone-related issues), parsley, ginger, dill, fennel, cumin, basil; dark lettuces, carrots, celery, sea vegetables, samphire, bok choy, green tea, pineapple, sweet potatoes, leeks and chives.

FERMENTED FOODS

Since a well-balanced gut microbiome is vital to wellbeing, fuelling the gut with healthy bacteria will improve digestion, boost immunity, and help the maintenance of a healthy weight.

In both East Asia and Eastern Europe, natural fermentation is a traditional way of conserving foods, with miso paste being used in Japan since 1200 AD, and cabbage put into wooden barrels to make sauerkraut every late autumn in Romania. The most beneficial fermented foods include kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, tamari, kefir, tempeh, sourdough, kombucha, and some non-pasteurised pickles.

HERBS

Stock up your cupboard with various herb teas, which can come in handy in various circumstances:

- Astragalus: known as the Great Protector, this is one of the most important health tonics, anti-aging and anti-inflammatory. It can be found in powdered form, capsules, or as dried slices which are ideal for use in soups or stews. Astragalus and elderberry is a common natural syrup for colds (do not use if you have autoimmune diseases)
- Echinacea
- Yarrow
- Sage
- Fresh ginger
- Boneset
- Nettle
- Red clover
- Ginseng
- Ginkgo biloba
- Sorrel
- Elderflower
- Pine
- Blueberry

BEE PRODUCTS

Despite my intention for this guide to be entirely vegan, I am including bee products here as they have active properties. Always check the label on a honey jar; numerous sellers blend honey with sugar, including Tesco who had to [withdraw their own label honey off the shelves](#) in 2019 which had been blended with sugar syrups to bulk it up.

Aside from honey, bees also provide: propolis, pollen, and royal jelly. The latter is particularly effective in cancer cases or used in convalescence. Eugen Giurgiu advises opening a capsule, moistening the powder with saliva, and keeping it under your tongue for 10 minutes. Do not take in cases of endocrine disruption, allergies, diabetes, or obesity.

COLDS AND FLUS

Ginger is antiviral, antiarthritic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antifungal, and has been used across the world for respiratory viral infections. To shorten the duration and intensity of colds, take ginger juice when first experiencing symptoms like a scratchy throat or light-headedness. Only use fresh ginger, as the powdered form won't have the same effect.

Peel and put a few pieces of ginger (roughly the size of a carrot) through a juicer, or grate finely. Aim to squeeze as much juice as possible.



Add 350 ml of hot water, one teaspoon of honey, quarter of the juice from a lime, and one-eighth of a teaspoon of cayenne pepper. Mix well, and drink four to six cups a day. Recipe from Stephen Harrod Buhner's [Herbal Antivirals](#).

Daikon's antimicrobial properties make it an excellent natural remedy for respiratory conditions. Excess phlegm or mucus can be cleared with daikon juice, which also eliminates bacteria. Smokers or those with shortness of breath can also use it regularly.

It can be consumed raw in salads, grated with carrot and apple cider vinegar, or added to soups, broths, and stews.

Chrysanthemum and honeysuckle tea

Chrysanthemum tea is used to treat respiratory problems, calm nerves, and support the eyesight, while honeysuckle treats sore throats, fevers, and dry coughs. Both are sold separately in herbal or East Asian shops, and can be mixed in a teapot.

Oregano and thyme are strong antivirals, and can be consumed as tea, individually or mixed, with honey added to taste if you wish.

Avoid dairy products and the nightshade family (tomato, aubergine, potato, peppers) when ill, as these products are inflammatory, and can intensify symptoms.

MAJOR ORGANS TO PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DURING THE PANDEMIC

Nourishing the lungs

The respiratory system as a whole, including the nose and sinuses, is responsible for taking oxygen into the body, and exhaling carbon dioxide. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the [Five Elements Theory](#) tells us that the lungs are associated with: the large intestine (so both need to be nourished); salt (if your body craves this it may be your lungs which need it); the autumn (each organ is connected to a season, and the lungs need protecting the most during that time); 3 to 7am (each organ is most active during a certain time of the day); the skin (each organ is linked to a connective tissue, and the lungs regulate the moistening of the skin, meaning that clear, wrinkle-free skin requires healthy lungs); the nose (a runny nose may be a sign that lung function is compromised); sadness and grief (organs are believed to be storers of emotional activity; if you struggle processing grief, there may be an imbalance in your lungs).

Whether this resonates with your belief systems or not, below are some foods that support the lungs, which can be added to your cooking:

The allium family:

- Garlic. Often considered nature's most powerful antibiotic, and studied by major civilisations including the Egyptians, Chinese, and Romans, garlic is antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal, helps cure hypertension, soothes sore throats and coughs, and

decongests the nose.

- Onion. Loaded with antioxidants, and most beneficial when eaten raw, this can help clear large amounts of white and loose phlegm.
- Leek

Aromatic herbs:

- Thyme. This powerful antiviral, when combined with honey, is thought to be 'the poor man's antibiotic'
- Rosemary
- Oregano
- Pine

Tonics:

- Astragalus. Though not recommended for those suffering from autoimmune conditions, cancer, or AIDS, and not for use in the case of fever, astragalus supports appropriate stress response and strengthens the lungs. In London, it can be purchased from [Food for All](#).
- Rhodiola

Spices:

- Cinnamon
- Cardamom
- Turmeric
- Cloves
- Cumin
- Ginger
- Hot pepper

Lung herbs:

- Licorice
- Elecampane
- Mullein

As well as: beans, daikon, horseradish, sweet potato, cabbage, broccoli, asparagus, celery, miso, almonds, banana, apricot, and pear.

Nourishing the liver

The liver's function is to detoxify chemicals, store blood, filter it from the digestive tract, then pass it to the rest of the body. It is associated with the spring; having entered this season in the UK, we need to pay special attention to this organ. Just as we routinely spring clean, we also need to cleanse the liver of the heavy foods consumed over winter.

According to the Five Elements Theory, the liver is also connected to the gallbladder; sour taste (similar to spring shoots like radishes, endives, mustard greens); is most active between 11 and 3am (which is why you may suffer more after an all-nighter

binge); stores anger (this also relates to old Romanian sayings, where annoyance toward someone is expressed by telling them they've damaged your liver); controls the tendons (weakness or inflexibility may indicate liver disharmony); and is connected to the eyes (it moistens them, and gives the capacity for sight).

To aid the liver and gallbladder, we must eat less, and smaller portions than during winter, ideally four hours before sleep as late night eating creates stagnation in the liver, impeding its ability to repair at night.

To deal with anger, which may trap us in certain behaviours, take advantage of the viral compassion happening around you with Mutual Aid groups. Try patience and forgiveness to gain courage.

Foods that support the liver:

- **Herbs:** fennel, basil, rosemary, dill, bay leaf, turmeric, ginger, mint, angelica root, and lemon balm
 - **Citrus fruit:** lemon and lime
 - **Whole grains:** barley (a powerful anti-viral; swap oat porridge for barley in the cold season), wheat, rye, quinoa, and brown rice
 - **Leafy vegetables:** kale, collards, bok choy, watercress, mustard greens, lettuce, and assorted tops like daikon, carrot, turnip and radish tops
 - **Sprouted** grains, beans, and seeds
 - **Berries** like schisandra improve liver function
 - **Detoxifying foods:** mung beans, cucumber, daikon, seaweeds, rhubarb, and radish (symbolising growth and renewal)
- Plus all of the detoxifying herbs from the 'Detox' section

Nourishing the spleen

The spleen is responsible for the production of white blood cells - however, alongside the stomach, in TCM it is also in charge of digestion; on the basis of strengthening the gut, the spleen also needs nourishment. One of its distinct features is that it keeps the other organs in place, so if the spleen is weak this may lead to prolapse of the bladder, or stomach, uterus. The spleen also connects to the mouth, so chewing is essential for its wellbeing.

Multitasking is a standard part of contemporary lifestyles, but eating on the go or in front of the TV is believed to damage the spleen. We may counter this by focusing on the simple action of eating mindfully, and chewing each bite at least 20 times. Additionally, taking regular daily breaks from social media, phones, and other modern stressors will not only be beneficial for your mental health, but for your spleen too. Another simple way to nourish it is by avoiding cold foods and drinks (especially ice), as low temperatures require the spleen to do extra work in digestion.

Foods that support the spleen:

- **Aromatic herbs:** cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, dill, cayenne, garlic, ginger, sage, thyme, and basil
- **Nuts:** walnuts, pistachios, chestnuts, and pine nuts
- Whole grains: amaranth, barley, oats, and rye
- **Lightly cooked vegetables:** pumpkin, alfafa, celery, carrot, parsnip, yam, turnip, and mushrooms
- **Legumes:** kidney beans, adzuki beans, black beans, lentils, and peas
- **Seeds:** sunflower, sesame, and pumpkin
- **Teas:** green, jasmine, raspberry leaf, and chai
- **Herbs:** astragalus, licorice, and ginseng
- Chinese red dates also strengthen the spleen, helping it tonify the blood (increase its energy), and calm the mind



TIPS

Here are a few more useful tips for general health and mindful consumption, as well as virus-prevention.

Soak

Perhaps the most important tip in this entire guide: grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds contain phytic acid, which impairs the absorption of iron, zinc, and calcium, and may promote mineral deficiencies. Through soaking, this is reduced, and you may find that certain intolerances discontinue over time as a result. Wash grains, nuts, and seeds thoroughly in three waters, then soak overnight. Doing this will also help organise the following day better, saving time. In addition, flavours become more fragrant. You may have noticed 'overnight oats' recipes on Instagram feeds; it can be instructive to investigate new fads (despite their promoting an 'ideal' way to eat and cook, which does not exist), as these may be rooted in centuries-old practices.

Eliminate sugar, processed foods and trans fats

This antagonistic trio turns energy into fatigue, causes irreversible damage to various organs, and compromises the immune system. Addictions are difficult to control, and being stuck indoors may exacerbate the need for so-called comfort foods, but take advantage of the lockdown to refrain from purchasing them; if they aren't in the cupboard, they can't be eaten.

Eat seasonally

As little as 100 years ago, people only ate what was available at a given time. Globalisation has made fruit and vegetables available year-round, resulting in our disconnection from knowing what should be grown in certain climates and when, in addition to [plants losing their nutritional qualities](#). Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and waiting for August to get to eat watermelon was always my favourite part of the summer. Food also tastes much better when suitably in ideal conditions, explaining why organic farmers' courgettes are sweeter, juicier, and more fragrant than those in supermarkets.

If possible, [eat locally and organic](#)

This will not only improve your health, but also contribute to organic farmers' income, enabling them to thrive in future, perhaps breaking our dependency on large chain supermarkets. Choosing to spend your money on farmers' produce also guarantees (in most cases) that your food will have fewer pesticides, is better for biodiversity, and contributes to keeping vernacular practices alive. Buying organic is indisputably more costly than processed or general supermarket food, though supermarket prices have risen since Brexit, with independent farmers having to keep theirs the same, creating more comparable pricing. Our modern values don't appreciate quality, but quantity; instead, buy less, eat less but better, and you'll end up reconciling your bank balance with your health.

Stockists are key

Spend time on research. Do price comparisons. Make lists you can check regularly. Find local suppliers, invest in their business; simple conversation (nonexistent in congested

supermarkets) might also result in knowledge or skills-exchange, and lead to life-long friendships. During lockdown, the connection will be even greater, alleviating symptoms of social isolation.

You might feel overwhelmed by the range of food items listed in the previous pages; buy one new adaptogen, tonic or herb a month, and you will have at least 12 new items in your pantry in a year's time. These last a long time, and you will feel prepared in case of future troubled times.

An old Romanian saying advises to keep breakfast to yourself, always share lunch, and give dinner to your enemy. Aim to skip dinner or have it early, to keep your liver, stomach, and spleen content, and [eat until you're 80% full](#) - an Okinawan principle.

Use recycled jars (sterilise and dry them well) to store everything that comes in plastic, as mould can easily grow on plants, ruining their active properties. Herbs, teas, and grains are particularly susceptible to mould.

The hysteria caused by COVID-19 may raise your anxiety levels, causing sleepless nights and irritability. If so, do not further overload your system by eating too much; try a water and herbal tea fast for a day, and observe whether your stress levels diminish. Fasting is not recommended for people who are ill or those with underlying health conditions. Alternatively, eat light meals so your stomach has less to digest.

Focus on prevention rather than last-minute solutions. The medicinal aspect of foods and herbs has been studied for centuries, and making time to research how some of these principles apply to your specific body will be beneficial in the long-term.

Be careful of deceptive weather; it may be sunny and warm outside, but it is important to remember what is needed in winter as well as spring: 25° one week, followed by heavy rain the other, is an indicator of unreliable weather as a consequence of climate change. Having only just entered spring, ice cream, iced drinks, and cold food (normally consumed in the summer) will negatively impact your spleen.

To prevent viruses like colds, which in TCM and Eastern European cultures are connected to the wind element, also be wary of vulnerable times: seasonal transitions from one to another, and the solstices and equinoxes - a total of eight turning points. The most sensitive bodily points are ankles, waist, and throat, so cover them well at these times.

Be mindful of your health and of both your body's full potential and its weaknesses - not only in times of crisis, but every day. Address them regularly, and be grateful for what you have, and aware of what can change around you. Share this knowledge with those who are struggling, are underserved, or are suffering during this time.

RECIPES

Here are some recipes straight from the privilege of my flat; recipes from someone whose duties of immediate care extend to my own and my partner's (and are equally shared); privilege of temporarily still having money to buy ingredients, and good-health and mental wellbeing to put this together. I hope this privilege helps those who might not have capacity for all these things at the moment.

These recipes have been collected from various sources, some modified to suit varied needs, others left as original, including from Romanian biochemist and herbalist Eugen Giurgiu's *Natural Remedies for Fighting Cancer*, Academy of Healing Nutrition's abundant curriculum, Jasmine Hamsely's *East by West*, Heng Ou's *The First Forty Days*, and Emergence Magazine's *Seasons of the Monastic Table*. I extend my gratitude to Eszter, Iulia, Paulina, and Xenia for adding culturally-rich recipes, as well as to my mother for passing down non-formal information, and to all those women whose contributions are always left out.

A few helpful notes:

- This guide uses ingredients found in London at the time of writing (April 2020), but which may not be available to you; please make substitutions as necessary. Also, particular [constitutions](#) tolerate foods differently, trust your instinct and experience if you have doubts about any ingredients or mixes.
- All recipes are vegan, due to my belief that respect and fairness ought to extend to all sentient beings. Bone broths and carefully selected meat (a maximum of twice a week) from ethical, organic, and cruelty-free farms have been proven to benefit overall health, but the majority of industrially-farmed animal products will contain hormones and antibiotics which can contribute to cancers, endocrine disruptions, allergies, and autoimmune diseases. If consuming animal products, you should identify reliable sources.
- Women's bodies have not only been written out of history, but barely investigated in medicine trials; drugs have different results during menstruation, meaning that women are often not included. Caroline Criado Perez's instructive [Invisible Women](#) explains that this frequently results in premature deaths, misdiagnoses, or more commonly, lifetimes spent in pain on the wrong drugs. Arguably, the underlying issue is institutionalised misogyny. As a result, little is known about how certain foods affect women (except in relation to common conditions such as polycystic ovaries, endometriosis etc.), so be aware when utilising certain recipes. One person's remedies may not be suitable for another.
- You will find no asparagus in the following recipes, as a gesture of solidarity with the Romanian food pickers.
- I do not usually use onion and garlic in cooking, so please add where suitable (soups etc.)
- In this limited selection of recipes made over the past two weeks, I used seasonal

produce where possible (focusing on what is available in the spring when sour foods are recommended), included combinations that soothe the lungs, spleen, and liver, and incorporated fermented foods and adaptogenic mushrooms, as well as anti-inflammatories, antioxidants, and foods high in enzymes, so that you feel hydrated, warm, and grounded.

- I hope you enjoy them.

SWEET POTATO BREAKFAST BOWL

SERVES 1

- 1 large sweet potato
- ½ cup plant-based milk
- 3 tbsp hazelnuts
- 3 tbsp dried mulberries
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 1 tbsp goji berries
- 1 capsule royal jelly

Peel the potatoes, and bake for 30-35 minutes, until soft (this can be done the night before).

Mash them with a fork, adding cinnamon, nutmeg, royal jelly, and mix with the milk, or throw in a blender for a smooth finish.

Pour content in a breakfast bowl and top up with hazelnuts, goji and mulberries.



BUCKWHEAT PORRIDGE & BAKED PLANTAIN

SERVES 1

1 ½ cup buckwheat groats
½ cup of plant-based milk
1 plantain
⅓ cup frozen berries
¼ tbsp beetroot powder
¼ tbsp hibiscus/rosehip powder (optional)
1 tbsp of raw honey as sweetener if you wish

Leave the buckwheat groats to soak overnight.

Preheat the oven, and line a baking tray with a small piece of parchment paper.

Peel the plantain, and bake with a sprinkle of oil for 15 minutes or until golden brown, then turn to the other side. Add ½ tbsp of honey just before taking it out of the oven.

Bring the buckwheat groats to boil, and simmer for 4-5 minutes, stirring carefully so they don't stick to the bottom of the pan. Add the milk, beetroot powder, berries, and hibiscus, and cook until the fruit is soft. Pour into a bowl, and add the plantain.



BARLEY PORRIDGE

SERVES 1

- ½ cup barley
 - ½ cup plant-based milk
(I used oat as it has the lowest carbon footprint)
 - ½ pear
 - 2-3 red dates
 - a pinch of cinnamon
 - 1 tbsp pumpkin seeds
 - 1 tbsp sunflower seeds
 - 2 Brazil nuts
- Optional
- ½ tbsp of coconut oil
 - ½ tbsp of tahini or sesame seeds to sprinkle

Barley water was once consumed by our ancestors as a health elixir; a powerful antiviral, barley makes a great alternative to oat porridge, so give this one a go if you prefer a sweet taste in the morning. It lowers cholesterol, maintains low sugar levels, and protects against gallstones. Red dates promote blood circulation, while the Brazil nuts contain your daily required selenium intake.

Wash the barley, seeds, nuts, and red dates in 3 waters, drain, then place in a bowl, submerge in water (2 inches above), and leave to soak overnight.

Next morning: Bring the barley to a boil, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon or rod called a 'spritle' as Scottish purists do - alternatively, use a rice cooker. It may take around 30-35 minutes to cook; you'll notice the consistency gets thick and slimey the longer it cooks - its nutrition lies in its starch. Once the barley has expanded three times in size, cube the pear, and add it to the mix together with a plant-based milk of your choice, cinnamon, nuts, seeds, red dates, goji berries, and coconut oil, if using. The oil's healthy fat will keep you full until lunchtime. Simmer for an extra 3 minutes.





CONGEE

SERVES 2

9 cups water (or vegetable stock)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup white rice (long grain, jasmine, sushi or arborio)

1 tbsp salt

1 tbsp olive oil

5-6 pieces astragalus root or lotus root (if available) or minced ginger/garlic (optional)

Congee is a classic Chinese dish usually served as breakfast, particularly popular with children or given to people who are ill or convalescing as it is easily digestible and nourishing. I also grew up with a similar pilaf-style dish (perhaps a distant cousin), which my mother always made when I was ill.

Try this dish when your energy is depleted, when you feel the need for hydrating foods, or are recovering from stomach bugs or colds. If you have a fever, leave out the astragalus, ginger, and garlic.

Rinse the rice, and leave to soak overnight.

Bring the water or stock and rice to boil in a large pot, adding salt and oil. Once the rice is boiling, turn the heat down, place a lid on top, with a bit of steam escaping, and let it simmer for around 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

The consistency needs to be similar to that of porridge, so cook until you are happy with the texture.

If using, quickly sauté the garlic and ginger, and add to the congee when served in bowls.

Additionally, you can use mushrooms, bok choy, or other greens.

Tip: If you have stomach pains, drink the cooked starchy rice water on its own - take a few mouthfuls and chew well before swallowing.

SPLIT PEAS WITH MUSHROOMS & MISO

SERVES 2

1 cup lentils

20 grams shiitake mushrooms

100 grams fresh mushrooms

4 cups shiitake mushroom broth

½ lemon juice

Salt and pepper to taste

1 tbsp tamari

2 tbsp miso

fresh parsley or other fresh herbs like basil, marjoram, oregano

Wash and soak the lentils overnight as instructed. If dried, soak the shiitake mushrooms in another bowl.

Drain the lentils, and mix with the water from the shiitake mushrooms, using it as a broth. Bring the lentils to a boil, and let them simmer.

In a different pan, lightly cook the fresh mushrooms and shiitake mushrooms with tamari, salt, and pepper, then add to the lentils and cook until the liquid evaporates.



WHITE RADISH GREENS

SERVES 2

about ½ kg white radish
leaves + stalks

3 tbsp of olive oil

a few dashes of tamari

My mother used to scoop out a small part of the white radish, pour honey in, and give me a teaspoon of the resulting liquid to cure a cough. It is recommended for people with thick phlegm as it clears congestion from the lungs.

I got these from Spitalfields City Farm, but I must admit I do not know where else you may find such beauties. I am including the recipe here, as it brought the spring feeling into the house.

Toss the stalks in a wok and stir-fry until tender (mine ended up too chewy; check with a fork or only use the thinner part), add the leaves for around 1-2 minutes at most - they should moisten but not lose their vibrant green colour.

Serve immediately with sesame seeds.





STEAMED BROCCOLI & MARINATED TEMPEH

SERVES 2

8 broccoli florets
10 pieces of tempeh
sesame to taste

Marinade

½ lemon juice
1 tbsp honey
5 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp tamari
1 tbsp finely grated ginger

Tahini dip

3 tbsp tahini paste
1 tbsp tamari
1 tbsp oil
sesame seeds to taste

Tempeh is made through the natural fermentation of soybeans into a cake form, which enhances the soybean's content of fibre, vitamins, and protein.

Dark green vegetables should only be steamed or thrown in hot water for 30 seconds or 1 minute at most. Bamboo steamers are the perfect utensil (and really affordable), as the lid does not allow condensation to form like traditional steel lids do. Once the vegetables' colour has changed to brilliant green, remove from the steamer.

Toss the tempeh pieces with all the marinade ingredients. If you can, leave them in the juice overnight, or at least 2-3 hours before cooking. Put the tempeh (including marinade) in a roasting tin, and bake until soft.

To make the tahini dip, mix all ingredients in a small bowl, until they become creamy.

Clean the broccoli and cut into smaller pieces. Add 3 cups of water to a saucepan and bring to a boil. Place the bamboo steamer on top, turn off the heat, and steam the broccoli florets for 1 minute.





MISO SOUP WITH SEASONAL VEGETABLES

SERVES 2

½ pack organic tofu
1 tbsp red miso
2 reishi capsules (or a few strips)
6 shiitake mushrooms, sliced
2 kombu strips
3 astragalus strips
¼ daikon
2 capsules reishi extract
1 pak choi
1 teaspoon of tamari
chopped green onion to taste
4 cups water

I recommend a hearty miso bowl regardless of the time of the year. The red variety is used during the cold season in broths and stews, and the white in the summer, in lighter soups or dressings. In this recipe, shiitake mushrooms and astragalus root work to strengthen the immune system, seaweed detoxifies, while miso stimulates digestion. Green onion and daikon nourish the lungs, of which we are so currently conscious of.

Add the water, astragalus, kombu, and tamari to a saucepan, and bring to a boil for 30 minutes.

Place the shiitake, tofu, and tamari in a separate pan, and cook lightly for 2-3 minutes (adding a dash of sesame oil if needed).

Remove the astragalus, add the rest of the ingredients, and continue cooking for another 15 minutes.

Dissolve the miso in a small bowl with 3 tablespoons of the broth, then add to the mix.

Take off the heat, and add the bok choy. Serve immediately with chopped onions, grated ginger, or toasted sesame seeds, if desired.

Tip: To preserve miso's healthy enzymes, always add it at the end, as it is already fermented.

BEETROOT SOUP WITH GREEN VEGETABLES

SERVES 4

1 beetroot
1/2 fennel
1 onion
1 inch ginger
1 carrot
1 potato
1 small daikon
4 cups water
¼ teaspoon pumpkin pie mix
¼ teaspoon of turmeric
1 veg stock cube (if desired)
generous amount of swiss
chard

Digestion starts in the mouth - and even when having soup, the first mouthful should always be chewed well. By doing this you will mechanically break down large aggregates of food molecules into smaller particles, which in turn will aid your digestion. Soup not only soothes the spleen, but also allows you to cook with leftover vegetables you might otherwise waste.

The potassium-rich broth builds blood, with beetroot and radish cleaning the liver, fennel and daikon aiding the lungs, and carrot, turmeric, and ginger keeping inflammation low. Using dark green vegetables in soups is the easiest way to pack in more nutrients, and use up the leaves before they get wilted.

Cut up the ginger, beetroot, and fennel, put them in a saucepan, and gently toss them in olive oil over a small flame. Add the spices.

Cover with water, add the stock cube, stir well, then gradually add the sliced daikon and carrot. Cook for around 40-45 minutes, or when the beetroot and daikon are soft (check with a fork).

Turn the heat off and toss in the swiss chard and white radish leaves. Leave for 5 minutes, then serve with a fresh salad of edible chrysanthemum and cucumber salad.



PUMPKIN SOUP WITH CARROT AND PARSNIP CRISPS

SERVES 2

1 squash
2 parsnips
1 carrot
1 inch ginger
salt to taste
2 tbsp cinnamon
2 tbsp pumpkin spice
½ coconut milk can
handful of walnuts
¼ cup of linseed
1 tbsp olive oi

Wash the squash really well (you can use boiled water, vinegar, or [Veggi Wash](#)), cut it into small pieces, keeping the peel. Add oil to a saucepan, and roast the squash and one parsnip together with the spices for 2-3 minutes. Top up with just enough water to cover the vegetables, and cook until soft. Purée the mix with a stick blender, or with a fork until you reach a creamy consistency.

To make parsnip and carrot crisps, peel the other parsnip and carrot into thin slices, and throw them in the oven on the lowest heat for about 4-5 minutes or until golden.

Add the walnuts and linseed to the soup, and finish off with coconut milk or even almond/soya single cream. Cook for a further 5 minutes on low heat, stirring continuously.

Serve with parsnip crisps, or other toppings of choice such as roasted vegetables, seeds, nuts, or herbs, if you are averse to the cold, you can add a pinch of chilli.





SWEET POTATO SOUP WITH CAVOLO NERO

SERVES 3

2 sweet potatoes
2 carrots
1 inch fresh ginger
½ tbsp cumin
¼ tbsp turmeric
½ tbsp nutmeg
½ tbsp cinnamon
4 cardamom pods
2 teaspoons oregano
2 teaspoons basil
1 cube veg stock
salt to taste
2 tbsp olive or coconut oil
4 cups water

Optional: coconut milk

Sweet potato (albeit the purple one) is an Okinawan staple, making up to 69% of their diet. The tradition goes back to those who could not afford rice having to settle for the island's most abundant crop. The orange sweet potatoes most widely available in the UK are packed with vitamin A, fibre, calcium, improve digestion, and attenuate the symptoms of asthma and bronchitis. The combination of sweet potato, carrot, and warming spices suits the sweet and punchy tastes, brings you heat, and soothes the spleen.

I used a red carrot so the colour changed from orange to red.

Heat the oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Add the sweet potatoes, carrots, cinnamon, cardamom, turmeric, fresh ginger, and cumin, and cook for 4-5 minutes, until the sweet potatoes are golden and softened.

Add the water, stock, oregano, and basil, and bring to a boil. Cover the saucepan. When the potatoes and carrots are soft, crush them with a fork or use a stick blender if you have one.

Bring some water to a boil in a saucepan or wok, place a colander above the saucepan, and a bamboo steamer on top. Once the water has boiled, add a few cavolo nero leaves (washed well before), and turn off the heat. In 3-4 minutes, the steam will make the leaves wilt, but still retain nutrients.

Pour the soup in a bowl, and top up with fresh sunflower and pumpkin seeds and cavolo nero.



SEED BREAD

SERVES 4

2 cups linseed
½ cup pumpkin seeds
½ cup sunflower seeds
3 tbsp chia
3 tbsp sesame
a handful walnuts if using
a handful hazelnuts if using
3 tbsp goji berries
4 tbsp olive oil
aromatic herbs like oregano/
parsley/turmeric/basil
salt and pepper to taste

While the sourdough craze is on (and for good reasons), I leave here a very simple bread alternative, packed with omega-3, protein, fibre, healthy fat, selenium, etc. No need to break the bank in a fancy bakery when a healthier equivalent is available.

The night before: wash the linseed, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, and nuts in a colander, then put in a bowl, pour enough water to cover, and soak overnight.

Add aromatic herbs, goji berries and the oil, and stir well until you get a thick and runny consistency. Enough to pour in a tray, but not too wet.

Transfer into a greased tin loaf, and bake on low heat until it hardens (over an hour).

Slice and serve with plant butter of choice, fresh crudités or even fruit spread.





RHUBARB AND BEETROOT PICKLES

SERVES 4

1-2 rhubarb stalks
1 beetroot
¼ cup apple cider vinegar
½ lemon juice
1 tbsp finely grated ginger
honey to taste

Contrary to widespread belief, you do not have to wait for months before eating your pickles. When using raw apple cider vinegar, you can prepare them around 30 minutes before your meal and still enjoy the same flavours and benefits.

Rhubarb is one of spring's first plants, and combining it with beetroot to build blood, and ginger to aid digestion, you have a complex trio to accompany dishes like rice, congee, or stews.

Use a peeler to slice the beetroot - try to do so as finely as possible. Cut the rhubarb into very thin strips. Put them in a bowl with the rest of the ingredients, then transfer to a sterilised airtight container in the fridge.

PISTACHIO SPREAD WITH CRUDITÉS

SERVES 2

60 gr raw pistachio nuts

½ lemon juice

salt to taste

The easiest way to incorporate enzymes into your diet is to make raw nut spreads. You can experiment with textures and consistencies, but this is the simplest, a two-ingredient recipe, taking only 5 minutes. Pistachios are an excellent source of protein, antioxidants, and fibre, and this can be savoured at breakfast, lunch, or as a snack.

Put the pistachios in a blender/ coffee or spice grinder, and mill until they turn to flour. Add the lemon, salt, and a few drops of water and blend again, until it turns into a thick paste. Chill it in the fridge for at least a few hours until serving, so the flavours can combine.

Serve with freshly cut vegetables like carrots or radishes.



ROASTED CABBAGE WITH THYME

SERVES 4

1 small green cabbage
4-5 tbsp olive oil
a few thyme sprigs
1 tbsp cumin seeds
2 tbsp lemon juice
pepper to taste

Wash the cabbage well, cut into four wedges and brush with olive oil.

Arrange in a baking tray, and sprinkle the cumin, thyme, pepper, or other desired herbs.

Roast for 15 minutes, then flip cabbage and continue roasting until tender.

Squeeze lemon juice over all wedges.



NETTLE SOUP

SERVES 2

6 cups nettle
½ cup cold water
6 cups vegetable stock
wild garlic to taste
freshly ground nutmeg
2 tbsp gluten-free flour
a dash of freshly ground nutmeg
a dash of lemon juice
pepper to taste

Optional: ½ pack silken tofu

Stinging nettle is rich in vitamins A, C, D, and K, iron, calcium, and protein, and an excellent detoxifying herb for the liver, particularly in the spring.

If foraging, be cautious of the stings, and [follow these rules](#).

Use rubber gloves when washing and rinsing the stinging nettle. Separate the leaves from the stem and place them in a colander.

To ensure the nettles don't sting you, bring salted water to a boil in a large saucepan, throw in the nettles and simmer for 5 minutes, then transfer to a bowl of iced water. Remove the nettles, and chop them finely.

Combine the cold water with the flour, pour in the saucepan and slowly add the vegetable stock. Throw in the nettles, and keep stirring, adding the wild garlic, pepper, nutmeg, and lemon juice.

Serve with a few cubes of silken tofu, and garnish with fresh herbs, microgreens or sprouts.

CAULIFLOWER SOUFFLÉ

SERVES 4

1 cauliflower
1 can organic chickpeas

SAUCE

4 tbsp olive oil
gluten-free flour
1 cup unsweetened plant-based milk
2 tbsp tapioca starch
½ cup palm-oil free vegan cheese, grated
1 tbsp caraway seeds
1 tbsp cumin seeds
salt to taste

Separate the cauliflower into florets, and bring to a boil in a large saucepan, until tender.

Add tapioca starch to two cups of water, whisking until it completely dissolves. Heat up the liquid, stirring so it doesn't stick. Remove before it starts to boil.

Blend this liquid with all other sauce ingredients, leaving the vegan cheese out.

Place the cauliflower florets in a baking tray, and pour the sauce on top, along with the cheese.

Bake for 20-25 minutes on a low heat.



TURMERIC AND CHINESE RED DATES HOT DRINK

SERVES 1

1 ½ cups of plant-based milk
(coconut usually works best
in this mix)

1 tbsp turmeric (alternatively,
½ inch of fresh turmeric -
grated)

1tbsp ginger (alternatively,
½ inch of fresh turmeric -
grated)

1 pinch of black pepper

½ tbsp coconut oil

1 cinnamon stick or 1 tbsp
cinnamon powder

½ honey if using

2 Chinese dates if using

Though turmeric is one of the best available anti-inflammatory, it's not a particularly palatable spice. Using it in hot drinks is a trick to incorporate it in your diet, and swapping coffee for healthier alternatives may give your breaks a different quality. Turmeric is fat-soluble (dissolves in fat) so to maximise its absorption combine it with healthy fat such as coconut oil. I added Chinese dates as a sweetener instead of honey, but use whatever you have available.

Put all ingredients in a saucepan, whisk the spices to mix well, and stir for about 3-4 minutes. Take off the heat just before it starts boiling, pour in a mug, and enjoy.

HERBAL TEAS

OREGANO / THYME

Add fresh oregano or thyme to a teapot, and top up with boiling water.

This helps clear up respiratory issues.

Stir in a teaspoon of honey when serving.

Commonly known as 'poor man's antibiotic'.

ANGELICA & CHINESE RED DATES

Bring to a boil 3-4 angelica root slices together with 4 Chinese dates.

Strain the angelica slices, and enjoy hot.

Angelica is used for anxiety, heartburn, or insomnia, but is also effective for menstruation issues. Combined with the dates, it enhances blood circulation.

CHRYSANTHEMUM FLOWER & GOJI

Add chrysanthemum flowers and goji berries to a teapot and top up with boiling water.

Powerful mix for eye health: chrysanthemum improves eyesights and stops headaches, while goji berries contain antioxidants that help with dry eyes, especially if using a computer regularly.

Dried chrysanthemum flowers can be purchased in Eastern European or Chinese shops.



PEAR TEA

Cube a pear, and bring to a boil in a saucepan, then let it simmer for 15 minutes.

It helps relieve the dryness in the throat.

WARMING TEA

Bring 7 slices of ginger, one lemon's rind, and 1 cinnamon stick to a boil for 20 minutes.

Helps regulate the body's temperature, and is particularly effective for women with poor circulation.

LICORICE, GINGER & CINNAMON

Bring licorice roots to a boil, together with ginger and cinnamon.

Strain, and drink hot.



ONION AND HONEY SYRUP

1 red or yellow onion
4 garlic cloves
1 inch freshly grated ginger
1 cup organic honey
a handful of herbs like thyme, oregano and sage

This is an Eastern European remedy for colds and coughs which soothes the lungs by working as an expectorant (loosening up the mucus so you can cough it out); when combined with antiviral herbs, it doubles its potency.

Cut up the onion in thin layers, grate the ginger, and mash the garlic.

In a sterilised jar, start arranging the everything in layers: one layer of onion, add herbs and honey, then onion and garlic, and repeat until the jar is full. Cover tightly, and let it sit overnight on the counter or for around 8-12 hours. Keep pressing the top layer down with a spoon to induce juicing.

Take one teaspoon, 3 times a day when ill.

ELDERBERRY SYRUP

1 cup dried elderberries
5 astragalus slices
4-5 reishi slices
1 tbsp schizandra berries
1 tbsp ground cardamom
1 tsp ground cloves
2 whole cinnamon sticks
peel of 1 organic lemon
2 inch piece of ginger
1 lemon juice
1 cup organic honey

Certainly the most enjoyable syrup of these three, this elderberry syrup recipe packs in medicinal mushroom benefits too, and feels like a delicious treat.

Add the elderberries and 6 cups of water to a saucepan, boil, then simmer for 30 minutes. Strain the berries through a mesh and squeeze out all the juice using a wooden spoon or flat utensil. Return the juice to the stove, along with the rest of the ingredients apart from the honey and ginger, and simmer until the liquid is reduced to half.

Remove from the stove, strain everything out again, and add the ginger juice (squeeze out as much as you can if you don't have a juicer). Finally, let it cool down and pour in lemon juice and honey. Transfer to an airtight bottle and keep in the fridge for up to three months. Take one teaspoon a day.

FIRE CIDER

2-3 cups apple cider vinegar
½ peeled and diced horseradish
½ peeled and diced garlic
½ cup peeled and diced onion
1 chile
¼ cup peeled and diced ginger
¼ cup peeled and diced turmeric
½ cup chopped parsley
2 tbsp chopped rosemary
2 tbsp chopped thyme
1 tbsp black pepper
¼ cup organic honey
1 orange, quartered, quartered, thinly cut
½ lemon quartered, thinly

Another traditional herbal remedy for colds, but which requires a bit more courage to make, and a tolerance to heat - so stay away if your digestive system is irritated by fiery ingredients like hot pepper or horseradish. The [recipe](#) tends to change according to individual taste, so feel free to include more herbs or leave some out.

Place everything in a large sterilised jar, ensuring the vinegar covers all ingredients. Shake well and let sit for 3-6 weeks, shaking occasionally. Strain everything into another jar, refridgerate and use for up to a year.

Once made, season your food with it, add to soups, or use as a preventive in the cold season - and take 1-2 teaspoons a day when ill.

GINGER PEARS

SERVES 2

2 pears, cut in half and cored
1 cup water
1 inch fresh ginger
10 green cardamom pods
1 cinnamon stick
1 unwaxed orange

Add water to a saucepan along with ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom, and bring to a boil.

Cut the orange into slices and place at the bottom of the saucepan, then drop the pears in.

Leave to simmer for 10 minutes, turning the pears onto the other side for another 10.



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