



Why Keeping Your Stomach Warm Can Help Your Digestion

In Chinese medical theories, the concept of keeping the stomach warm is a foundational principle for supporting strong, healthy digestion. *“The Stomach Loathes Cold”* is an ancient saying. While modern Western habits often include smoothies, iced drinks and raw salads, Chinese medical theories view these choices as potential disruptors to digestive balance.

It’s true for everyone, but is particularly important if you struggle with gas, bloating, irregular bowel movements, or digestive discomfort. Applying this time-tested concept in your life may help you feel better now.

Warm Stomach, Strong Digestion: A Core Principle

In Chinese Medicine, the stomach is known as the “cooking pot” of digestion. Like soup simmering on the stove, your digestive system relies on internal warmth to properly break down food and transform it into energy (what we call Qi, pronounced “chee”) and nutrients. When this internal fire weakens, digestion slows, which can lead to symptoms like bloating, gas, loose stools/constipation, stomach or intestine discomfort, and low energy after eating.

How Cold and Too Many Raw Veggies Weaken Digestion

Ice and Cold: A Shock to the System

Drinking iced beverages—especially during meals—is believed to extinguish the “digestive fire.” In Chinese Medicine, this is like pouring cold water into a pot of simmering soup. It slows down the cooking process. Modern science also suggests that cold liquids can constrict blood vessels and temporarily slow down enzymatic activity, which may hinder nutrient absorption. If you often feel sluggish or bloated after meals, try skipping the ice and sipping warm or room temperature water instead.

Careful with Too Many Raw Veggies: Harder to Digest Than You Think

Raw vegetables may be rich in nutrients, but they are not easy to digest. Especially for people with weak digestion or those prone to bloating and gas, too many raw foods may overwhelm the digestive system. Cooked vegetables, warm meals, and lightly steamed greens are easier on the stomach and still nutrient-dense. You also don’t have to eliminate them altogether. Look at **BALANCING** the cold with warm/hot

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5 long term health benefits of keeping the stomach warm

Keeping the stomach warm, making sure it is balanced, and not too cold, is not just a seasonal suggestion—it's a daily practice for better long-term health. Here's why:

👍1 Improved Nutrient Absorption

Warmth in the digestive system helps activate enzymes and maintain efficient stomach acid levels, both of which are necessary for breaking down food into absorbable nutrients. When digestion is sluggish due to internal cold, nutrients may pass through incompletely digested, leading to malabsorption of nutrients, deficiencies, fatigue, and weakened immunity.

👍2 Better Tolerance for a Variety of Foods

Keeping the stomach warm strengthens what Chinese Medicine calls the “Spleen-Stomach axis,” improving your body's ability to handle a broader range of foods without bloating, discomfort, or irregular bowel movements. Over time, this can reduce symptoms that look like food sensitivities and reactive digestion, allowing for a more varied and enjoyable diet.

👍3 Reduced Bloating, Gas, and Inflammation

Cold foods slow motility and cause stagnation in the digestive tract, leading to bloating, gas, and even inflammation. Chronic digestive stagnation can also create “dampness” in the body (in Chinese medical terms), which is associated with fatigue, heaviness, and even weight gain. Warmth supports smooth digestion and consistent elimination, helping reduce this internal burden.

👍4 Strengthened Immune Function

In Chinese medicine, the body's Wei Qi (defensive Qi, akin to immunity) is viewed as generated through digestion. Modern medicine similarly recognizes that much of the immune system is housed in the gut. Supporting a warm, efficient digestion helps build resilience and can help prevent recurring colds, flus, and other chronic illnesses.

👍5 More Stable Mood and Mental Clarity

Chinese Medicine links digestion to the Yi, the “learning mind” (a reflection of the brain/gut axis in modern medical theories.) The Chinese have said since ancient times that a warm, well-functioning digestive system helps prevent or be part of the remedy for the “foggy thinking,” worry, and anxiety that can be a source or effect of digestive weakness. Over time, this contributes to better emotional regulation and cognitive clarity.

5 Simple and Flexible Tips to Support Digestive Warmth

1 **Drink Warm Water or Herbal Teas**

Swap ice water for room temperature or warm drinks throughout the day. Herbal teas can gently stimulate digestive energy and reduce bloating. But even a glass of warm water helps.

2 **Prioritize Cooked Foods**

Whenever possible, choose cooked or lightly steamed meals over raw or cold options. Warm soups, stews, and sautéed vegetables are especially helpful in colder months or for those with sensitive digestion.

3 **Avoid Excessively Cold Foods**

Ice cream, smoothies, and cold leftovers straight from the fridge can chill your digestive system. When you do indulge, try balancing with a cup of hot tea or warm water afterward.

4 **Balance Cold Foods with Warming Elements**

Not all cold foods need to be avoided — they just need to be balanced. A perfect example of this can be seen in a traditional Japanese sushi meal. While sushi includes raw and often cold elements like fish and vinegared rice, it is typically paired with warming companions: a steaming bowl of miso soup, freshly grated wasabi, pickled ginger, and hot green tea. These additions help stimulate digestion and protect the stomach from the chilling effects of raw food.

You can apply this principle at home, too. If you're enjoying a raw salad, cold smoothie, or iced beverage, follow it with a cup of hot water or herbal tea to support digestive warmth. You can flexibly apply this principle by adding ginger to your smoothie for example. Or a quick warm tea after that ice cream. Seasonal issues come into play as well - you might be able to tolerate that cold beer in the summer, but not in the winter. This gentle balancing act allows you to enjoy a wide range of foods while keeping your digestive fire strong.

5 **Chew More Than You Think You Need To**

Digestion starts in the mouth. Chewing thoroughly not only breaks down food for easier absorption but also begins the warming process. This is especially important when eating raw vegetables, nuts, or cold dishes. It is akin to chopping vegetables before putting them in soup. The more chewing, the less work your stomach has to do. We tend to eat really fast in the modern world. I encourage you to use this idea as a way to encourage yourself to slow down and not rush the eating process.