

## Western Energetics - Betzy Bancroft, RH

Energetics is the recognition that we are nature, and the same patterns and laws at play in the observable natural world are also functioning within the plants and the human body. Early philosophers recognized the principle of 'as above, so below', and with modern tools we can appreciate just how true this is. For example, motion is faster in a warm environment, whether in our cells or stew pot. Our Western energetic system, Humoral Medicine, was developed by the Greeks in the early part of our common era and spread by the extensive writings of Galen.

The four fundamental qualities are heat, cold, damp and dry. They are common to other medical systems because we share the same nature. The west has maintained four elements or constitutional types – Earth (Melancholic), Air (Sanguine), Fire (Choleric) and Water (Phlegmatic), each characterized by these qualities.

Heat, Cold, Dampness and Dryness each have particular characteristics that affect our structures, organs and their functions. By recognizing the influence of each quality on the body, we can learn to see the patterns that these natural qualities create. Plants possess each of these qualities as well, and we employ the opposite energy to promote balance—for example a cooling herb applied to a hot condition.

**Heat** – active, hyper-function, stimulating, rising, floating. Heating remedies warm the body, increase its kinetic functions such as digestion, metabolism and circulation; they promote a steady inner fire that burns cleanly.

Herbs with heating effects include our pungent spices: ginger, garlic, cayenne, prickly ash, cinnamon, rosemary, oregano, bee balm, horseradish, black pepper, mustard seed. Warming foods include more protein and fat (calorie) rich--nuts/seeds, eggs, meats. Vigorous exercise and action are heating influences in life.

Balance any excessive heat with cooling remedies, foods, habits (see next section).

### *Signs of heat:*

*feeling of uncomfortable heat/ aversion to heat*

*prefers cold drinks & food/ excessive thirst*

*quick exhaustion of energy*

*undue discomfort in fevers, on hot days*

*burning & irritation in pit of stomach*

*weak and rapid pulse*

*yellow mucus, stools, urine*

*dark, scanty urination*

*red face, eyes, tongue / yellow coated tongue*

*tender, swollen, hot tissues*

*warm skin, hands, feet*

*irritability/ hypersensitivity*

*constipation- esp with hard, dry stool*

*excessive or accelerated function/metabolism*

*prone to inflammation*

*dislikes pressure, massage*

*likes to stretch, sleeps stretched out*

*loud voice, talkative*

**Cold** - slow, heavy, depressed, sinking, hypo-function, thickening or condensing. Cooling remedies reduce excessive stimulation, sensitivity, heat; they tend to be grounding, calming and soothing. They include bitters-dandelion root, artichoke leaf, gentian; demulcents – marshmallow, plantain; and relaxants like skullcap, motherwort, blue vervain. Cooling foods include fruits and vegetables, cooling habits include meditation, slow exercise like walking. (Bitter herbs are a special category of cooling remedies because they stimulate digestive secretions and thus assimilation, and so don't depress our functions. But they are grounding and steady!)

Warm, stimulate and circulate to balance excess cold--spices and exercise are ideal (previous section).

*Signs of cold:*

*feelings of coldness/ aversion to cold*  
*prefers warm food and drinks/ craves warmth*  
*slowness, dull or unresponsive/ lethargy, little movement*  
*laxity of joints*  
*pale moist tongue/ white tongue coat*  
*pale or bluish, purplish skin, tongue, etc.*  
*clear discharges, urine, nasal, mucus/ tendency to phlegm*  
*slow or deep pulse*  
*achy pain in joints, flesh*  
*low blood pressure*  
*cold extremities/ lack of circulation*  
*lacking sensation or stimulation*  
*tendency toward stagnation*  
*prefers deep massage*  
*curled lying posture or hunched over*  
*quiet voice, soft and shallow breathing*

**Damp** – involves the fluids of the body (interstitial, blood, lymph, sweat, urine, other secretions); congesting & stagnating from lack of circulation; or running & leaking from excessively relaxed or porous tissues.

When dampness is accumulated in edema or boggieness, remedy by moving the dampness out of eliminatory channels (diaphoretics-yarrow, elderflower; diuretics-nettle, parsley, dandelion leaf; alteratives-cleavers, red clover) or circulating excess moisture with aromatics (angelica, thyme, mugwort). When tissues are leaking, tighten them with astringents (raspberry leaf, blackberry root, meadowsweet) or heal them with vulneraries (plantain or calendula).

*Signs of dampness:*

*edema*  
*watery stool*  
*lassitude/ excessively relaxed*  
*no desire to drink, even if thirsty/ intolerance of moist foods*  
*heavy, stiff or sore joints*  
*heavy diarrhea or vaginal discharge*  
*tendency to diarrhea and dyspepsia*  
*excessive salivation & nasal secretions*  
*copious, congealed, or cloudy excretions and secretions*  
*pulse obscured*  
*tongue coated (white)*  
*congested lymph nodes*

*oozing rashes*  
*feeling of fullness*  
*lack of appetite and sensation of taste*  
*excess of sleep*  
*tendency toward heaviness and turbidity*  
*distention or soreness in chest, head, flank, belly*  
*tendency toward thickness and stagnation*

**Dryness** – indicates a lack of moisture and fluids (dehydration). They may be dried up by excess heat or depletion, like the kettle burning because the tea water evaporated. Dryness in our tissues produces contraction or tightening, withering, lack of lubrication and a lack of nutrition provided by proper hydration, fluid circulation and healthy fats.

Balance excess dryness with demulcents- marshmallow, plantain, comfrey; healthy fats in the diet, and moistening, nourishing tonics – oats, solomon’s seal, burdock root, linden.

*Signs of dryness:*

*dehydration*  
*dry, hard stools*  
*dry, rough, chapped or cracked skin*  
*dry cough, dry tongue*  
*pulse weak, slightly tense*  
*unusually thirsty/no sweating*  
*pale, withered appearance/ wasting*  
*scanty fluids/ creaky joints*  
*rigid or brittle tissues*  
*intolerance of dry foods, attraction to moist foods*  
*discomfort in autumn, dry environments*  
*insomnia*  
*hot water and light oils readily absorbed*

References:

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The Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism, Matthew Wood, North Atlantic Books 2004