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## **Postpartum Recovery and Rebuilding**

Making a full recovery after childbirth is important for the overall health and well-being of mother and child in Chinese Medicine and this is a time when support for the mother should be given wherever possible.

It is ideal if new mothers can focus completely on the baby and resting for the first 4 weeks at least to establish a strong bond and make sure she has adequate reserves for feeding (this is especially important and longer may be needed if the birth was long, difficult or there was a lot of blood loss).

Moderate, gentle exercise such as yoga, tai chi, walking is recommended as these are important to help restore pelvic muscles and improve circulation.

It is also best to try and avoid getting both too hot and too cold as body meridians are more open than normal due to blood loss during the labour (sunbathing and swimming are not advised, also blow dry wet hair rather than leaving it to dry naturally). Because the meridians are especially open during this time extremes in temperature can leave the body susceptible to damage/illness.

Keeping visitors to a minimum having only short visits during this time is also helpful as most women find it exhausting to have to 'entertain'. Visitors would do well to help with chores while they are visiting or look after baby while mother has a shower.

Ways support people can help include making sure the new mother has a ready supply of nutritious food and helping out with housework, other children etc.

## **Acupuncture to aid recovery from childbirth**

Around 5 days after the birth is an ideal time to get your acupuncturist to do a home visit for a 'mother warming' treatment which is aimed at aiding in the recovery of the lower abdominal area and energy levels of the mother.

Additional treatments may also be beneficial to boost energy every 7-14 days and are important prevention for any problematic symptoms that could arise during the post-natal phase.

If any issues do arise such as insufficient lactation, mastitis, blocked ducts, depression, anaemia and exhaustion, acupuncture treatments are generally very helpful in resolving these problems and are much easier to resolve the earlier they are addressed.

## **Nutritional needs of a new mother**

Easy to digest foods are much easier on the body during recovery; this generally means cooking food rather than having it raw. Nourishing foods such as casseroles, stews and soups which cook grains, pulses and meats slowly make it easy for the body to assimilate the nutrients of the food.

Home-made bone soup (organic bones are best) is one of the main rebuilding medicinal dishes given to those recovering during the postpartum phase in Asian countries to help ensure adequate milk supply for breast feeding and help replace nutrients lost during the birthing process (see recipe section for bone broth including vegetarian option).

Rice congee - Jook is another traditional medicinal dish given to those who are recovering from any illness or post-natal rebuilding.

Beneficial herbs are also often added to dishes in order to enhance the foods ability to nourish the blood and qi. Ideas for ingredients are outlined in the recipe section and can be taken from the food lists below.



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**Foods to nourish qi** – almond, beef, carrot, cherry, chicken, chickpea, coconut, date, eel, egg, fig, grape, ham, herring, lentil, longan, microalgae (spirulina), raw whole milk, millet, molasses, oats, octopus, potato, quinoa, rabbit, rice, royal jelly, sardine, kumara, shitake mushroom (and any of the Chinese dried mushrooms), mushroom, squash, tempeh, tofu, trout, venison, yam

**Foods to nourish blood** – aduki bean, apricot, beef, beetroot, bone marrow, cherry, chicken egg, dates (especially dried Chinese red dates), fig, grape, kale, seaweed, kidney and black beans, dark leafy greens, liver, microalgae (spirulina), mussel, nettle, octopus, oxtail, oyster, parsley, sardine, spinach, stout, squid, sweet rice, tempeh, watercress

**Foods to nourish essence/jing** – almond, artichoke leaf, bone marrow, chicken, egg, kidney, liver, microalgae, raw whole milk, mussel, nettle, oyster, bee pollen, royal jelly, seaweed, sesame seed (especially black sesame), walnut

**Foods to be avoided** at this stage are ones that are pungent to taste (curries, chillies etc) as these can easily damage the blood and yin which is delicate during this time and foods that are chilled and cold. Many medications such as antibiotics, aspirin and antacids are cold in nature so are best avoided where possible.

Recipes below demonstrate good basic examples of blood and qi building for the new mothers. All ingredients are available at most Asian grocers - goji berries, liquorice root, kudzu, black sesame, shiitake mushrooms (sometimes found fresh these days) and seaweed such as korengo, wakame and kelp/kombu can also now be found in organic shops.

Pacific harvest has a good range of seaweeds with some such as korengo, kelp and agar being sourced from New Zealand.

Longan fruit can be obtained fresh from supermarkets sometimes or dried from Asian grocers.



## Recipes

### ***Bone stock/broth***

Classic Asian examples of nutritious bone broths or stocks to rebuild a recovering mother are chicken or beef and seaweed.

The stock can be used as an ingredient for making other dishes or a simple soup snack and should be eaten over several days.

Follow directions for *Beef broth* in the **Korean postpartum seaweed soup** substituting chicken for the beef if desired, a vegetarian option is also outlined with Dried Chinese mushrooms (shitake).

**Preparation for cooking broth** - *feiseui* (flying through water) or parboiling meat and poultry is thought to be very important before the ingredients are acceptable for adding to soup.

The process involves putting the raw bones/meat (preferably skinned with fat trimmed and rinsed) in boiling water with a few slices of ginger and boiling for 5-10 minutes until the foamy coagulation rises to the top, discard the water then rinse the bones/meat thoroughly (Chen, 2009). Some would also soak the bones in water for about 30 minutes prior to boiling (Chang 2011).

As a child I was told that the foam that rises to the top of the pot is the toxicities that come out of the meat/bones.

### ***Korean Postpartum Seaweed Soup***

#### *Beef broth*

1 pound beef bone, oxtail or shank.

30 cups of water, or water to fill stock pot

Broth:

Fill stock pot with water and prepared beef bone, oxtail or shank and bring to a boil. Simmer for 2-3 hours. Set aside and let broth cool down. Skim fat.

Beef bone and bone from oxtail and shank can be used 2-3 times to produce beef broth. If using oxtail or shank, remove meat before boiling for second time.

#### *Vegetarian broth*

4 dried Shiitake mushrooms

one handful dried kelp (kelp/kombu is available in strips and one would generally be adequate)

half an onion

Rinse dried mushrooms and kelp and place in 8 cups of water. Soak in water for 2 hours. Add onion and bring to boil. Boil for 10 minutes. Remove mushrooms, kelp, and onion from broth.

#### *Seaweed soup using prepared broth*

1. 2 cups of rinsed and drained seaweed (take handful of dried kombu, cover with water and soak for 15-30 minutes - some types of seaweed such as wakame and karengo need only 2-3 minutes soaking).

Rinse, drain and chop into bite-size pieces if needed.

2. Add seaweed and 5-6 cups soup stock; bring to a boil. (If you used oxtail or shank, add the cooked meat to soup.) Boil for about 15 minutes over medium heat.

3. Add 1-2 teaspoon soy sauce or salt, to taste.



### *Simple beef seaweed soup*

1. Cut beef, such as brisket, into small pieces.
2. Add sesame oil to pot and cook meat on medium heat.
3. Add seaweed that has been soaked and drained.
4. Slowly add 5-6 cups of water/broth and bring to a boil.

NOTE: Seaweed soup for postpartum mothers is supposed to be bland but if needed add some chives, sesame oil and seasoning at the end. (Adapted from Chang, 2011).

### ***Miso with bone stock and seaweed***

Soak 1 Tablespoon seaweed (wakame is the green seaweed often seen with miso but any quick cooking seaweed is good) for 2 minutes.

Bring to the boil 2.5 cups of stock add wakame and any other vegetables or tofu you may want to add (and cut small) then simmer for about 5 minutes.

In a bowl mix 4 Tablespoons of the hot stock water to the miso paste and mix until all lumps are dissolved.

Pour the miso mix back into the pot and stir then garnish with chives or spring onion.

\*\*Avoid boiling miso as this can destroy the fermented microorganisms that are beneficial.

(Adapted from Basic Miso Soup, Pg 67 - Wang, Sheir & Ono, 2010)

### ***Rice Congee – Jook***

A simple and nourishing medicinal food with many possible variations to suit every taste. It can be made into a savoury or sweet dish. The basic recipe...

½ cup rice

4-5 cups of water or stock (depending on whether you like a watery, soupy jook or a thick, creamy, porridgy jook).

Bring to the boil then lower heat and simmer on low heat until rice has broken down and mixture becomes the consistency of porridge (if you want a thick jook). A good hour is usually adequate time for this unless using brown rice which may take a bit longer (generally brown rice jook is a bit more watery as it's not as glutenous).

Make up your own Jook recipes by choosing from the Qi and Blood building foods above, some examples are...

Savoury versions can be made with stock (bone or vegetarian):

Shitake mushroom (pre-soaked and finely sliced) with chicken slices.

Seafood of your choice and fresh ginger.

Aduki bean and beetroot.

Seaweed, shitake mushroom and Chinese red date.

To garnish with spring onion/chives/parsley, a dash of soy sauce and toasted sesame oil.

Sweet versions:

Chinese red date (or normal date), dried longan fruit, fresh ginger

Fig and almond

Coconut and citrus peel

Apricot and ginger



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For extra protein add some amaranth or quinoa.

To garnish choose from - honey, bee pollen, tahini, seeds (chia/toasted sesame/flax/sunflower), milk, fresh fruit.

### ***Coconut Water and Spirulina***

Coconut water (ideally unpasteurized - in NZ the drinking coconuts are our only option) and spirulina taken together help build blood.  
(Farrell & Erlich, 2012)

### ***Papaya Fish Tail Soup***

1 papaya

½ cup blanched peanuts

14g dried mandarin peel

2 teaspoons vegetable oil

7 thin slices of fresh ginger

1 cleaned fish tail (can be replaced with fish of any type but the bones and skin would have extra nutrients rather than just a fillet).

2 tablespoons of cooking wine (usually rice in Chinese cooking but any will do)

4 honey dates rinsed (if you wish to substitute honey dates are sweeter than red dates but not as sweet as common dates seen in western supermarkets)

Peel papaya, remove seeds/pulp and cut into chunks.

Boil peanuts in about a litre of water for 30 minutes then reduce heat and slow cook for 3-5 hours until soft (this can be done in a thermal cooker/crock pot/slow cooker).

Soak mandarin peel in cold water for 30 minutes then scrape off white pith on inside skin and discard.

Heat oil in a pan; add 4 slices of ginger and the fish. Pan-fry both sides of fish until golden brown.

Add cooking wine and 2 cups of water, cook for a further 2 minutes and set aside.

In a large pot put peanut, dates, orange peel and remaining ginger with 2.5 litres of cold water. Cook on high heat for 30 minutes.

Add papaya, bring to boil then reduce heat and continue cooking for another 30 minutes.

Add the fish tail with its liquid and simmer for 15 minutes.

Season with salt. (Adapted from Chen, 2009)



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### ***State of Return Chicken Soup***

900-1350g raw chicken pieces or chopped half chicken  
8 cups water  
pinch of salt  
1 (1 inch) piece of fresh ginger cut into slices  
3-5g dangui (not to be taken when pregnant)  
6 small-medium sized piece of astragalus (huang qi)  
1 heaped tablespoon of Goji berries (gou qi zi)  
6-8 dried Chinese red dates with the seed taken out (hong zao)  
4 cloves of garlic (minced)  
2 tablespoons rice wine  
2 medium carrots – cut into ½ inch slices  
2 medium stalks of celery – cut into ½ inch slices  
soy sauce to garnish  
spring onions or chives for garnish

Combine chicken water and salt bringing to boil and skim off excess fat/oil.  
Tie ginger, dang gui, astragalus, in cheese cloth and add along with goji berries, red dates, garlic and wine.  
Bring back to boil then simmer for 45 minutes and skim off any excess fat/oil.  
Add the carrots and celery and cook for another 10 minutes.  
Add garnishes to taste. (Wang, Sheir & Ono, 2010)

### ***Life-force Chicken and Mushrooms in Wine***

10g dried black wood ear (hei mu er)  
8 dries or fresh shitake mushrooms  
¼ cup soy sauce  
2 tablespoon rice wine or medium-dry sherry (any cooking alcohol is fine)  
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil  
1 piece of fresh ginger (1 inch) minced  
1-2 cloves of garlic  
3 spring onions  
1 tablespoon starch (kudzu, corn, potato or other thickener)  
1 ½ cups water  
1 small chicken cut up or 1350-1800g of chicken pieces

Soak wood ear and dried shitake mushrooms in warm water until soft (about 30 minutes). Just wash fresh shitake.  
Cut wood ear into 1 inch pieces, cut stems out of shitake if dried (these can be added to stocks or broths next time you make some) and cut into ¼ inch slices.  
Make marinade – mix soy sauce, rice wine, sesame oil, ginger, garlic, and spring onions. In a separate dish mix starch with 2 Tbl of water until smooth then add to the marinade.  
Toss chicken, wood ear and shitake in the marinade until well coated then let sit for 30 minutes.  
Pour 1 ½ cups of water into heavy pot and add chicken, wood ear, shitake and marinade. Bring to boil then lower heat and simmer for about 30 minutes or until chicken cooked. (Adapted from Pg 154 - Wang, Sheir & Ono, 2010)



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### **Smooth Black Sesame Cereal**

2 tablespoon black sesame seeds (roast or dry fry first)  
¼ cup rice  
2 cups of water  
pinch of salt (optional)  
honey  
milk  
sliced fresh fruit

Grind sesame seeds and rice in blender to make a black powder.

Bring water to a boil in a pot then add rice mixture slowly constantly stirring, add salt if using.

Lower the heat to simmer and continue stirring for 10-15 minutes.

Mixture should be creamy and smooth; if it is still grainy you can blend again once cool.

Add honey to taste and top with milk and fruit. (Adapted from Pg 199 - Wang, Sheir & Ono, 2010)

### **Possible Asian grocery list**

Dried red dates (jujube/da zao or hong zao without seed)

Honey dates (jujube date preserved in honey - mi zao)

Shitake mushrooms (xiang gu) dried or fresh

Goji berries (Gou ji zi/wolfberry)

Dried longan fruit (Long yan/dragon eye fruit)

Liquorice root (gan cao)

Mandarin peel (chen pi)

Dang gui (angelica) – dang gui is contraindicated for pregnancy

Astragalus (huang qi)

Black wood ear (hei mu er)

Brown seaweed (hai zao) is similar to the Japanese wakame.

Green seaweed (kun bu) or kombu in Japanese

- brown and green seaweed is often used together in Chinese cooking.

Rice wine



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