

# Blood Deficiency

The concept of blood in traditional Chinese medicine shares a close relationship with the western concept of blood in that it has both a nourishing and moistening function. However, blood is far more than purely the cells that transport our oxygen, it overlaps certainly but also isn't the same as anemia. Blood is seen as a condensed form of energy, or qi. The quality of our Blood is a measure of the available nourishment circulating in our body as well as the structure of the body. Blood nourishes our muscles, organs, brain, and every part of us.

We also need enough qi to help the blood circulate to where it is needed. And the health of your digestive system determines the ability to successfully obtain nourishment from your food, which determines the quality of your blood. It is through daily living that we use blood, it's the foundation that our life force combusts to create energy, and there must be a sustainable balance between rest and nourishment, and function and activity. Firstly we must ensure all the conditions for generating blood are there such as getting enough rest, not pushing ourselves too much, not living off of coffee, limiting stress, having a restful and nourishing home environment, a life that is balanced.

As well as being the source of nourishment for bodily activity, the blood is also said to house the mind, or spirit. The blood provides the container for our consciousness, the body and blood anchors and allows our thoughts and emotions to be rooted and healthfully flow.

When our blood is strong we tend to feel vigorous, well nourished and full-bloodedly alive. When our blood is weak, we may not feel we have enough to function and not fully in touch with who we are. We may experience separation, as if the mind is floating, it isn't anchored in the blood. At night the mind may float so much that we cannot sleep. Or perhaps we may be malnourished, thin, weak, or dry. Likely there is low energy, perhaps headache after activity, dizziness, pale skin, an all around empty feeling. Depression and anxiety thrive in blood deficiency as there isn't enough blood to root the spirit. Small amounts of menstrual blood and longer cycles are common as well.

## Supporting Our Blood Through Food

Blood deficiency is one pattern that is especially responsive to dietary changes. Blood deficiency almost always occurs against a backdrop of digestive issues, so follow these suggestions to generate more blood.

All animal products, beans, nuts and seeds, and certain vegetables will strengthen the blood. Red meats such as beef and bison most strongly strengthens the blood, then meats are on a descending spectrum moving to lamb, pork, chicken, then fish. However the denser foods are more difficult to process, so a balance is still key. In severe cases of blood depletion, animal organs may be helpful. Focus on adequate lean protein intake and lots of dark colored vegetables (preferably lightly cooked). Dark green leafy vegetables and chlorophyll rich foods are helpful, especially when combined with grains.

It takes 120 days to fully renew the blood, so dietary changes need to be maintained for this period of time to have full effect to correct the imbalance, but then find a new balance where one isn't consuming more than one is producing. As food forms the basis of the blood, we may simply say eat well and widely. The overuse of fatty foods, denatured foods and sweetened or salted foods will tend to weaken the blood.

Blood nourishing foods include: meat and fish, dairy (small amount, if appropriate), eggs, legumes (larger denser beans like blackbean and garbanzo more than lentil), root vegetables (beets are the strongest blood building vegetable), dark green vegetables like kale, brussel sprouts, and spinach, homemade soups and stocks, nuts, seeds, seaweed, and miso.