As early as thousands of years ago, our ancestors already understood the laws governing the origin, development and changes of life. They recognized that nothing on earth was immutable: the elderly declined and died, while the young grew and developed, and the process of growth, change and death was perpetual and without cessation. In all living organisms, including human beings, growth, development, maturity and aging are all objective laws independent of man’s will. It is absolutely impossible for anyone to change these laws and live forever without death. Nevertheless, to the extent that we are able to recognize and master the laws of life and their characteristics in the different developmental stages of life, it is possible to prolong life. The life span may be extended if one delays the transformation of life towards aging and death. This may be achieved by creating all the necessary conditions that can adapt the body to the climatic changes of the external world, and by increasing the metabolic function and resistance of the organism to disease. Guided by these realisations and knowledge, our ancestors gradually created methods of health preservation to strengthen the physical constitution, delay aging and prolong life. Health preservation later became a science which studied and laid down systematically the theories and methods of health preservation. The formation of systematic theories for health preservation started in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (722-221 B.C.). Health preservation was discussed in the works of Laozi, Confucius and Mencius. The understanding of health preservation and prolongation of life by various schools of thought and their exponents at that time had a great influence on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). For instance, in The Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic, one of the earliest classical medical works, the thoughts of our ancestors concerning health preservation were summarized and systematically discussed from the medical point of view. Physicians and health preservation specialists of later generations, including Zhang Zhong Jing (about 1563-1640 A.D.), Ge Hong (281-341 A.D.), Chao Yuanfang (550-630 A.D.), Sun Simiao (581-682 A.D.) and others further enriched and developed the theories of health preservation.

Owing to its close relationship to the basic necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter and transportation, health preservation is multifaceted, involving all aspects of human life. There are, for instance, health preservation observations for the four seasons, regulation of daily life, cultivation of the mind, dietary regulation, physical and breathing exercises, Qigong, sexual hygiene, acupuncture, moxibustion and massage, medication for prolonging the life span, and measures against senility and ageing. In each of these forms of health preservation, there are also many schools, and in each school there are many styles and methods. No matter how varied these methods are, they all have common features, that is, they are simple and convenient, effective and low in cost. These methods have spread widely and have aroused attention and great interest throughout the world. The following is a brief introduction to traditional Chinese methods of health preservation.

**Health Preservation in the Four Seasons**

Seasonal and circadian changes may directly influence the vital activities of all things on the earth, including man. Thus, to be healthy and enjoy longevity, one must recognize the regularity of nature’s changes and try to adapt to them by regulating the organism. TCM places great importance on the effects of the seasons and climatic changes on the human body, and considers that whenever there are changes in nature there will be responses in man, indicating an intimate correlation between the natural world and human beings. A series of theories and measures for health preservation have correspondingly been proposed to assist adaptation of...
the body to these natural changes. There are two guiding principles. One is over-clothing the body in spring while under-clothing it in autumn. Here spring refers to early spring, and autumn to early autumn. These two seasons have abrupt changes in climate. In early spring the climate changes from cold to warm. At this time the pores begin to open, not being so closed as in winter, and bodily resistance to cold becomes somewhat weaker, whilst cold still lingers in the air. Over-clothing means not taking off winter clothes too early and not doing too much outdoor exercise. It also means not going to public places often to avoid infection by epidemic diseases. In early autumn, the climate begins to change from hot to cold, yet it is still quite warm. The pores are still open, and in order to increase bodily resistance against disease it is necessary for the organism to adapt gradually to the climatic change from hot to cold to enhance the resistance of the superficial skin against cold. Under-clothing means not putting on autumn clothes too early and doing as much outdoor exercise as possible, since shutting oneself indoors lowers the adaptability of the body to cold weather.

The second principle is to replenish Yang in spring and summer and nourish Yin in autumn and winter. Yang, also called Yang-qi, is the general term for the energy, heat and vital activity of the organism. Yin, also called Yin essence, refers to the nutrients in the body; it is the material basis of energy and motor power.

During spring and summer, all things on earth are overflowing and vigorous and the human metabolism also becomes exuberant day by day. In order to conform to the changes of nature, one needs to activate the body vitality, make Yang more exuberant and vigorous, so that the body is filled with Yang-qi. At the same time, over-exhaustion of the energy and body heat should be avoided. In autumn and winter, the weather begins to turn cold, and all things on earth tend to be hidden and stored. The human metabolism also tends to slow down. At this time the Yang-qi of the body begins to gradually withdraw inward. Therefore, one should keep the body warm and avoid cold so as to prevent the escape of too much Yang-qi. This is also beneficial to the preservation of Yin essence in the body, which serves as the material, nutrient basis for the sprouting of Yang-qi the next year. The nourishing of Yin-qi in autumn and winter means to harvest and store vital essence. In other words, it is to preserve Yin-essence through latent storage. Generally speaking, health preservation in the four seasons includes the following points:

Adjusting to the Changes of the Four Seasons

Health preservation in spring: The three months of spring refer to February, March and April, including the following six solar terms: The Beginning of Spring, Rain Water, Waking of Insects, Spring Equinox, Pure Brightness and Grain Rain. In spring, the climate begins to turn warm, and the air also changes from dry to wet. Correspondingly, the dermal striae (the superficial defence) gradually become loose and moist, and the circulation of qi and blood also becomes vigorous. At this time the hidden Yang-qi gradually sprouts and grows outward as though awakening from hibernation, and one usually feels comfortable but lazy, often called “spring-sleepiness”. The theory of traditional health preservation holds that one should adapt to these physiological changes in daily life: rise early in the morning and retire early at night; one’s clothes should be loose enough; exercise by taking slow walks to relax the body and make one comfortable. Mentally, one should be broad-minded and optimistic, not depressed, irritated or stressed. This is the proper method of adapting to the spring season and preserving the qi of spring. If things run in the opposite direction, sprouting of Yang-qi will be affected and the Liver harmed. In diet, one should take little acrid, hot and spicy food, whilst those who are deficient in Yang-qi should avoid cold, raw food so as not to harm Yang-qi.

Health preservation in summer: The three months of summer refer to May, June and July, including the following six solar terms: Beginning of Summer, Grain Full, Grain in Ear, Summer Solstice, Slight Heat and Great Heat. The heat of summer tends to drain human Yang-qi from the body. In order to preserve and nourish Yang-qi, one should retire late at night and rise early in the morning. One should keep an optimistic attitude to the external world and avoid losing one’s temper, so as to keep qi functioning normally and circulating smoothly. Going to bed late is to adjust to the insufficiency of Yin-qi due to the shorter night in summer, while rising early adjusts to the longer daytime. In diet, one should take less bitter but more acrid food to nourish lung-qi and avoid over-exuberant heart-fire, as too much heart-fire usually leads to restriction of the flow of lung-qi.

Health preservation in autumn: The three months of autumn refer to August, September and October, covering the following six solar terms: Beginning of Autumn, Limit of Heat, White Dew, Autumnal Equinox, Cold Dew and Frost’s Descent. Autumn is the season when, with the climate turning cold, Yin-qi begins to become prosperous and to rise while Yang-qi gradually withdraws. At this time almost all plants on earth bear fruit. Human beings should adjust to the changes of the natural environment - “early to bed and early to rise.” To rise early is to endow oneself with freshness and coolness, while to retire early is to avoid cold and chill. Mentally, one should keep a calm mind, and be free from worries and distractions so as to keep lung-qi pure and descendant. In diet, less acrid cold food but more sour, warm, sweet food should be taken; in this way lung-qi is nourished with good flow and no stagnation.

Health preservation in winter: The three months of winter include November, December, and January of the following year, covering the following six solar terms: Beginning of Winter, Slight Snow, Great Snow, the Winter Solstice, Slight Cold and Great Cold. In winter, the weather is cold, Yin-qi is excessive, and all things on earth are static and hidden. To adapt to the climatic changes, one should retire early and rise late. Retiring early nourishes Yang-qi, while rising late nourishes Yin-qi. One’s skin should not be overexposed to cold so as to avoid injuring Yang-qi. One should wear warm, loose, soft clothes. In regulation of mind, one should be emotionally stable, sober-minded, and not easily angered so as to avoid disturbance of Yang-qi. In diet, one should take less salty, but more bitter nutritious food so as to enrich Yin-essence and retain Yang-qi in the body. Only
by so doing can one prevent disease and keep fit.

**Daily Health Preservation**

Daily health preservation refers to a rational life regime and a regular daily life. This method of health preservation, which is beneficial to the prolongation of the life span, involves various aspects of daily life.

**Regular Daily Life**

Regular daily life means to live according to a regular regime, i.e., to live according to a plan. The Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic states that one should be moderate in eating and drinking, live a regular life, and never exhaust oneself in order to keep the body and mind in harmony and unity, and thus enjoy a maximum life span.

1. **Conforming to the circadian order**

   It is said in Plain Questions (Su Wen) that at sunrise the yang qi of the body begins to grow. At noon, when the sun is brightest, the qi in the body is exuberant, and at dusk when the sun sets, yang qi in the body begins to decrease. It is clear that the growth, exuberance and decrease of yang qi in the body reflect the circadian order. Therefore, all the activities of the human body should comply with this circadian rhythm. A regular life, including a rational arrangement of work and rest, can result in the metabolism of the organism proceeding in a normal cycle of tension alternating with relaxation. This is very important to ensure good health.

2. **Cultivating Good Sleep Habits**

   Health preservation practice in TCM attaches great importance to sleep, regarding it as essential to the preservation of health. The following points should be observed:
   i. Keeping a calm mind, eating lightly and doing moderate exercise before sleep.
   ii. Avoiding wind, exposing the head during sleep, and sleeping alone.
   iii. Click the teeth, breathe in and out heavily, swallow saliva and massage the body on waking up.
   iv. Bed and pillows

   As for the bed and pillow, TCM advocates the use of a low bed, about 40 to 50 cm high, i.e. slightly above the sleeper’s knee joint, as too high a bed inconveniences the sleeper in getting in and out of bed, while too low a bed provides poor ventilation and much moisture. The bed should be neither too soft nor too hard. The conventional materials for beds are palm fibre, rattan, bamboo and wooden board. The mattress should be thick and soft enough to fit the bodily curves so that the muscles of the whole body can be relaxed. Different pillows may be used for different purposes. For instance, pillows filled with buckwheat husks are useful for individuals with excessive yang and fire; pillows of sorghum and rice husks suit individuals with yang insufficiency and excess of yin. In summer, pillows made of mung bean skin, bamboo or gypsum are good to clear away summer heat.

**Sixteen Items of Advice on Body Building in Daily Life**

To preserve good health and strengthen the body by doing a daily exercise routine is a major feature of daily health preservation; paying attention to even very common, trivial life activities may be beneficial to health preservation and prolongation of life. The following is the advice on body building in daily life given in ‘Main Ideas in Prolonging Life’ by Leng Qian, a famous physician of the Ming Dynasty.

1. **Rubbing the face**

   This means rubbing the cheeks with both hands. Every morning, first rub the hands together until they are warm, then rub both cheeks with the hands more than 10 times as if washing the face, until the face feels slightly warm. Or, one may use a cold wet towel to rub the face until it glows. Rubbing the face for some time each morning while washing the face promotes circulation of both qi and blood in the face and ensures a good complexion. Rubbing the face can also alleviate fatigue and enhance vigour.

2. **Combing the hair**

   Combing the hair stimulates the circulation of qi and blood in the head. According to TCM, the head is the confluence of all the channels and collaterals, and combing the hair serves as a form of massage, promoting circulation of qi and blood, alleviating fatigue, and refreshing the mind. Thrust all ten fingers into the hair, slightly press the scalp, and run the fingers back and forth, as if combing the hair, until a sensation of soreness and distention is felt. Or, one may use a comb, combing...
the mind. This is the method of mental tranquillization. Time every day, one will have a sound, clear and quick mental relaxation so as to keep the mind calm for some time. Too much thinking, anxiety and nervousness will inevitably result in exhaustion of the Shen, leading to mental fatigue and deficiency in energy. If one can be mentally relaxed after being held in the elevated position for a while; then open them suddenly, breathe in and gaze fixedly at some object. Repetition of this procedure several times a day may clear liver fire and improve vision.

4. Covering the ears
This involves lowering and raising the head with the hands covering both ears. The movement of lowering and raising the head is repeated 5-7 times. While doing so one should keep the mind quiet by ridding it of all distracting thoughts. Persistence in doing this exercise may keep one’s mind clear. It also serves as a therapeutic method for dizziness and vertigo.

5. Clicking the teeth
Clicking the teeth refers to knocking the upper and lower teeth together. One may do this 36 times in bed after waking up. Prolonged practice may strengthen the teeth.

6. Closing the mouth
Closing the mouth from time to time with the tongue touching the upper palate and breathing slowly and evenly for a period of time helps invigorate functional activities of qi and produce body fluid.

7. Swallowing the saliva
Saliva, which has the effect of strengthening the spleen and stomach and promoting digestion, is usually present in the mouth and swallowed from time to time. Each morning one may move the tongue up and down in the oral cavity and gargle to collect saliva until it fills the oral cavity. Then swallow three times, each time swallowing one third of it. This greatly helps the digestion and absorption of the gastro-intestinal tract.

8. Raising qi
The elevation of qi refers to the synergistic action of respiration and elevation of the anus, i.e. while slowly inspiring through the nose, the anus is being gently, continuously elevated. When expiring, the anus is relaxed after being held in the elevated position for a while. Frequent elevation of qi is beneficial to qi functioning in the body. For the elderly, it can prevent prolapse of the abdomen.

9. To calm the mind
When the mind is calm, qi and blood flow normally and harmoniously, and the emotions are undisturbed. If one maintains a calm mind, is free from distracting thoughts, annoyance, and sorrow and keeps an optimistic attitude, the qi and blood within the body will circulate without obstruction, thus making one energetic and vigorous. Otherwise, anxiety and anger will result in stasis of qi and blood, which is very harmful to health.

10. To store the Shen
This refers to the use of the mind, consciousness and thinking. Too much thinking, anxiety and nervousness will inevitably result in exhaustion of the Shen, leading to mental fatigue and deficiency in energy. If one can be mentally relaxed so as to keep the mind calm for some time every day, one will have a sound, clear and quick mind. This is the method of mental tranquilization.

11. To keep the back warm
The back region is the residence of the Du channel and the bladder channel of Foot-Taiyang, and the place where evil wind and cold easily enter the body. Therefore, the back should be always kept warm in order to prevent evil wind and cold from entering the body, and to reinforce the kidney and strengthen the lumbar region. A sleeveless garment is excellent to protect the back and keep it warm, and is especially good for the weak and the old.

12. To massage the abdomen
This is to massage the abdomen clockwise and counterclockwise, 30 to 50 times each. It is very helpful to digestion if it is done after meals. Frequent massage on the abdomen can alleviate abdominal distention and treat constipation.

13. To protect the thorax
The thorax contains the heart and lungs, and therefore care should be taken not to hurt it. Massage applied to the thorax can relieve chest oppression, regulate the flow of qi, and enhance the functions of the heart and lungs.

14. To hold the scrotum tightly
This is the same thing as “the kidney holding qigong” in traditional health preservation practice. The method is to hold the scrotum tightly in the hand for some time in the morning before getting up and at night after retiring to bed. While holding the scrotum one should close the mouth and breathe evenly. In so doing one can nourish the kidney qi, reinforce the kidney, strengthen the lumbar region, and delay senility.

15. To keep silent
The vital qi is easily lost if one talks too much, whereas keeping silent can enrich the vital qi. So it is good for the health to talk less. This is particularly true for the weak and the aged.

16. To dry-wash the skin
To dry-wash the skin means to rub the skin of the whole body. Dry-washing the skin can accelerate the circulation of qi and blood, relax the muscles and tendons, as well as make the skin moist smooth and elastic.

All the above methods are easy to perform, but the key point of achieving satisfactory effects in curing disease, building up health and prolonging the life span is persistent practice. These methods originated as early as in the Jin and Sui Dynasties and were handed down because of the wonderful effects which had been proved by generation after generation.

Health Preservation by Dietary Regime
If one pays sufficient attention to certain dietary methods and laws, and chooses foods according to the body’s needs, a person may preserve energetic vitality, promote health and prolong the life span. TCM dietary regime includes two aspects: dietary regulation and dietary habits. A brief introduction follows.

1. Dietary regulation
The Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic states that a diet containing the cereals, rice, millet, wheat and beans as staple foods, with various fruits, meat, eggs and vegetables as subsidiary foods is beneficial to health by meeting the body’s nutritional needs. Neglecting proper regulation of foods leads to improper nutrition and harms health. The following points should be considered when
Planning a rational diet.

i. The daily diet should include both staple and subsidiary foods.

None should be omitted, nor should one take a single type of food to the exclusion of others for a long time.

ii. Attention should be paid to the proper adjustment of the five flavours.

In TCM, foods are classified into five flavours according to their taste, namely, sour, sweet, bitter, acrid and salty. The five flavours differ from one another in their nutrient value and a proper balance of the five flavours not only provides the body with nutrients, but also stimulates appetite and promotes digestion and absorption. To ensure a balance of the five flavours means taking them into account when cooking. Addition to certain flavours may result in imbalance and affect one’s health. It is stated in The Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic that too much salty food will affect the circulation of qi and blood in the channels and collaterals; too much bitter food will harm the skin, making it haggard; too much acrid food will damage the muscles, making them liable to contract and cause the nails to wither; too much sour food will cause the skin and muscles to become loose and wrinkled and the lips to protrude, and too much sweet food will injure the bones.

iii. Adjustment of diet according to differences in the individual, age, and sex.

Dietary intake should vary from person to person. For instance, children and juveniles should eat more legumes, meat, eggs and vegetables to guarantee adequate intake of the proteins, vitamins and minerals needed for growth. The elderly should eat more dairy products, eggs, vegetables and foods with properties that have an anti-ageing effect, such as milk, soft-shelled turtle, walnuts, sesame, mulberries and Chinese yam. During menstruation or pregnancy, women should take more nutritious food so as to meet the requirement of the body. Postpartum, women should take more foods that replenish qi and nourish blood. These include millet, dates, eggs, longan fruit, fish, meat, and brown sugar, which help restore physical strength and enable the mother to nurse the newborn.

iv. Foods should be prescribed in accordance with the changes of season.

Dietary regulation according to the climatic changes of the four seasons is very important to health. In spring, all things on earth are overflowing and vigorous, and the yang-qi is rising. At this time, the yang-qi within the body also begins to rise. Thus, one should add onions, coriander, wheat, fermented soya beans, dates, and peanuts to the diet to support the rising of yang-qi. In summer, all things on earth are growing luxuriantly, and one should take less acrid, sweet, dry and hot foods, but take more tomatoes, lentil beans, cucumber, lettuce, smoked plum, watermelon, and mung beans, which are sour, cool and light in nature. Excessive cold foods and drinks are harmful to health. In autumn, all things on earth bear fruit, and the climate becomes dry. One should consume less acrid and hot foods, but take more soft foods which have a moistening effect, such as glutinous rice, rice, sesame, honey and dairy products in order to nourish the stomach and promote the production of body fluid. In winter, when natural phenomena are in hiding and storage and the weather is cold, one should take more warm and hot foods, such as mutton, beef, and soft-shelled turtle in order to preserve the yang-qi in the body. For the aged and weak, winter is the season to take nourishing foods to build up their health. Besides seasonal changes, foods should be chosen according to local conditions. The general principle is that more warm and hot foods should be taken in cold areas; more cold or cool foods in hot areas; more acrid foods in moist and damp areas; and more sweet foods and foods with moistening effect in dry areas. There is a common belief that people in the south are fond of sweet things, in the north salty things, in the east acrid things, and in the west sour things. These dietary habits were formed because of the natural environment and the climate in these different areas.

v. Dietary incompatibilities

Owing to the differences in individual constitution, dietary restrictions should vary from person to person. According to TCM, obese people usually have phlegm-dampness and therefore should emphasise light and easily digestible foods and take less fat, sweet and greasy foods. This type of diet strengthens the Spleen, resolves dampness, promotes digestion and helps in weight loss. Thin people usually suffer from endogenous heat of deficiency type due to insufficiency of yin fluid, deficiency of blood and scanty body fluid. Their diet should therefore include more sweet foods and foods which have a moistening effect to promote the production of body fluid. They should limit the consumption of acrid and hot foods, for the latter can exhaust or damage the yin fluid. Persons with excess of yang are liable to suffer from excessive internal heat, and therefore for them sweet, light, cool and easily digested foods are better than greasy and acrid foods. They should also abstain from spirits. Old people whose strength is waning should be given light, warm, soft and cooked foods, since greedy, fatty, sticky, hard, raw and cold foods will certainly harm them. Light foods are not only abundant in nutrients, but also easily assimilated. Moreover, these foods are beneficial to health and longevity as they will not result in atherosclerosis due to accumulation of fat.

Patients with certain chronic diseases should consider dietary incompatibilities. For instance, hypertensive patients should eat celery, jellyfish, kelp, water chestnuts, bananas, mung beans, corn, and peanuts, but not greasy, fatty and acrid foods, nor spirits. Hyperlipidemic patients should eat hawthorn, onions, and garlic, and drink plenty of tea. For them, foods rich in animal fat should be strictly avoided. Diabetic patients should take oatmeal, buckwheat, milk, beef, mutton, chicken, and eggs, and drink green tea. For them, foods rich in carbohydrates as well as animal brain, roe, egg yolk, fatty meat, and animal viscerae should be avoided. Patients with coronary diseases should take more coarse food grains, such as corn, beans, coarse cereals and vegetable cellulose as in Chinese chives, celery, and bean sprouts. For them, foods rich in fat, strong tea, spirits, and coffee should be limited. Patients with sores and pyogenic infections should emphasise foods that are light and easily digested, abstaining from mutton, shrimps, crab,
seafood and foods of acrid flavour or other stimulants. In short, selecting foods according to different conditions benefits health and also plays a supplementary role in treating disease.

2. Good dining practices.

Good dining practices refers to principles of health preservation that should be observed during meals. The nutrients in one’s diet are undoubtedly important, but dining practices are of great significance. The following are aspects worth observing.

i. Be moderate in dining.
This refers to having meals at a fixed time and in fixed quantity. In China, there is a folk saying: “Eat a hearty breakfast, a moderate lunch and a small supper.”

ii. Take your time.
It is important to eat slowly, chew thoroughly before swallowing, and never to “wolf down” food. Eating hurriedly results in indigestion. Eating too much at one meal quickly overburdens the gastrointestinal tract and may lead to accidents like choking, irritation and coughing that injure the body.

iii. Concentrate on dining.
During meals, it is beneficial to concentrate one’s attention on dining. Undivided attention not only helps in tasting the food, but also in digesting and assimilating it. If one is disturbed by distracting thoughts during a meal and eats absentmindedly, one’s appetite will inevitably be affected, resulting in poor digestion and absorption.

iv. Be happy at mealtime
Since ancient times we have had a tradition of listening to music while dining. An optimistic mood before, during and after meals enhances appetite and digestive function.

v. Rub the abdomen after meals.
Rubbing the abdomen after meals is a traditional measure in dietary practice. The method is as follows: After meals, first rub the hands until they are warm, then place the warm palms on the upper abdomen; rub the abdomen circularly clockwise 20 to 30 times, then counterclockwise also 20 to 30 times. This massages the stomach and intestines, promoting digestion and absorption.

vi. Take a walk after meals.
It is very bad to lie down immediately after meals. One should take some mild exercise following a short rest after meals. Taking a stroll is a very good form of exercise and is a traditional measure for health preservation. In China a saying goes: “Walk a hundred paces after a meal and one can live ninety-nine years.”

vii. Rinse the mouth after meals.
Rinsing the mouth often is a good habit that keeps the oral cavity clean and the teeth firm, and prevents dental caries. As early as the Spring and Autumn Period (B.C. 770-476), rinsing the mouth was a popular habit, and has since been a part of China’s traditional dietary regime.