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## **Traditional Thai Medicine Doctors Treat Illnesses by Using Food Tastes**

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Traditional Thai medicine is based on a concrete philosophy that differs from today's modern medicine. According to the traditional Thai medicine, illnesses are believed to be caused by five factors: innate illnesses, tumor illnesses, accidental injuries, infectious illnesses, and other kinds of sickness. Traditional Thai medicine is neither like Chinese medicine which using Yin-Yang theory nor the same as European's homeopathy which uses a theory of applying poisons to resist poisons.

The theory of traditional Thai medicine is influenced by the ancient Indian medicine of Ayurveda. It is based on the belief that our body consists of four principle elements including earth, water, wind, and fire. If these elements are in balance condition, we will be strong. On a contrary, if they are dysfunctions or are disturbed by any external factors, we will be sick.

Factors causing the four elements to be imbalanced are such as changes of time in one day, season changing, changes in aging, and resident or environmental changes. For instance, when rainy season comes, we usually have a cold or if we encounter dust, we may develop respiratory diseases or in case of pregnant women, they may have a symptom similar to women in menopause stage.

The philosophy of traditional Thai medicine is based on the four elements; therefore, the treatment is designed to balance the four elements and food is a primary remedy. Each kind of food causes our elements to change. When we eat the kind of food that helps adjusting our elements into a balance condition, the illnesses will be gone.

According to the traditional Thai medicine, tastes of food and herbs are divided into nine different tastes. Each taste provides distinguished abilities to treat different kinds of sickness. In case of being sick, traditional Thai doctors will have you take both herbal medicine and food.

Herbal medicine is too complicated to be prepared by normal people. Food, however, is easier to be prepared. The nine different tastes are as follows:

1. Acrid taste - Food providing this taste are such as the top part of cashew leave, Kra Doon, raw banana, Matoom On, and quite raw guava. These foods connect and close each element causing a person to have constipation. Diarrhea can be cured by this type of food.

2. Sweet taste- Food providing this taste are such as lettuce, cabbage, Phak Wan Pa, Angle Loofah, the top part of Kae leave, Bai Ya Nang, mushroom, and bitter sweet gourd . This kind of food provides energy, freshness, and is good to be consumed during hot weather when we usually feel fatigue, dizzy or headache. If eating a lot of them, you will feel sleepy and may have lots of gas in your stomach.

3. Bitter taste - Bitter taste can be found in Neem or Margosa leave, Siamese Cassia, Bitter Cucumber, Bai Yor, Slender amaranth, and Sesban flower including the inner part. Their medical actions are to cure infections, bile and blood. They are good to treat ailments such as feeling uncomfortable before having a fever or when having a fever. When taking these foods, patients will feel better but taking too much of them can also cause fatigue.

4. Hot and spicy taste - This taste can be found in chili, ginger, galingale, red onion, onion, pepper, mint, Sweet Basil, Dill. These vegetables help reduce choke due to abdominal causes, and stomachache. They are also good for those having lots of gas in their stomach or those who belch a lot. Hot and spicy food is appropriate in rainy and winter seasons for it prevents damp and keeps the body warm. However, taking too much of it can also cause fatigue.

5. Crispy and starchy taste - This taste can be found in Krathin, Sator, Look Niang, pumpkin, Thua Poo, and wild yam. Its medical actions are to treat tendon jerk reflex, bodily discomfort, and muscles sharp pain. This taste is also suitable for elderly people who have difficulties in sitting and standing or those who sprain.

6. Sour taste - Sour taste can be found in orange, pomelo, Samor, lemon, leech lime, and Carambola. Its medical actions are to reduce phlegm, mucolysis, and improve blood quality. They are also good for treating cold and chronic cough. Sour taste can also cool down our body temperature in summer and making us feel comfortable. However, taking a large amount of sour food can cause bloating, and diarrhea particularly.

7. Salty taste - Salty taste can be found in salt. Its medical actions are to cure numbness, and itching. Salt can absorb through skin and cure exanthematous fevers. If taking too much salty food, you will feel thirsty.

8. Fragrant and cold taste - This taste can be found in various kinds of flowers such as Cowslip Creeper, Hemp Fesbania, roses, Marigold, water spinach, water mimosa, and Thai water lily. It can refresh the body, use as cardiac stimulant, and is suitable for hot weather. This food taste can refresh our feeling when we are inactive, or sad.

9. Drunken taste - This taste can be found in marijuana, and Mithragyna speciosa. Its medical actions are to cure infections. This kind of taste, however, is being used for medication purpose only, but not for cooking.

Thai folk medicine doctors highly recognize the importance of food taste. Thus, we always hear that we must eat food according to our body's main element, an element that dominates other elements. For example, if a person has earth element as the dominant element, that person is usually fat, short and has dark skin. People with earth element should eat acrid and crispy and starchy food which has less calories. People whose dominant element is water are inert and usually fair and chubby. Their appropriate food taste is sour. For those with wind element domination, their body is normally tall and thin and their appropriate food taste is hot and spicy. Fire element people are skinny, have rough skin and are intolerable to hot weather. These people should take bitter and cold food taste so that they can keep their elements in balance stage.

In case of getting sick, patients have to eat food that can rebalance their elements. The dominant element, symptoms, and seasons determine the food taste being taken. The doctors will analyze all these factors together and prescribe food and herbal medicine which offers appropriate taste in order to correct and adjust the elements into balance condition. By doing this, illnesses can be cured.