



# Preserving Stomach during Farming Seasons

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Kuanshan, Taitung, a desolate town with picturesque scenery, is economically dependent on agriculture. Patients in Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital are therefore predominantly farmers. The labor-intense farm work coupled with erratic schedule, these farm workers tend to eat fast, prefer food that are marinated or curled, and naturally the leading cause of their visit to the hospital is stomach issues.

“Dr. Chen, why do I always feel

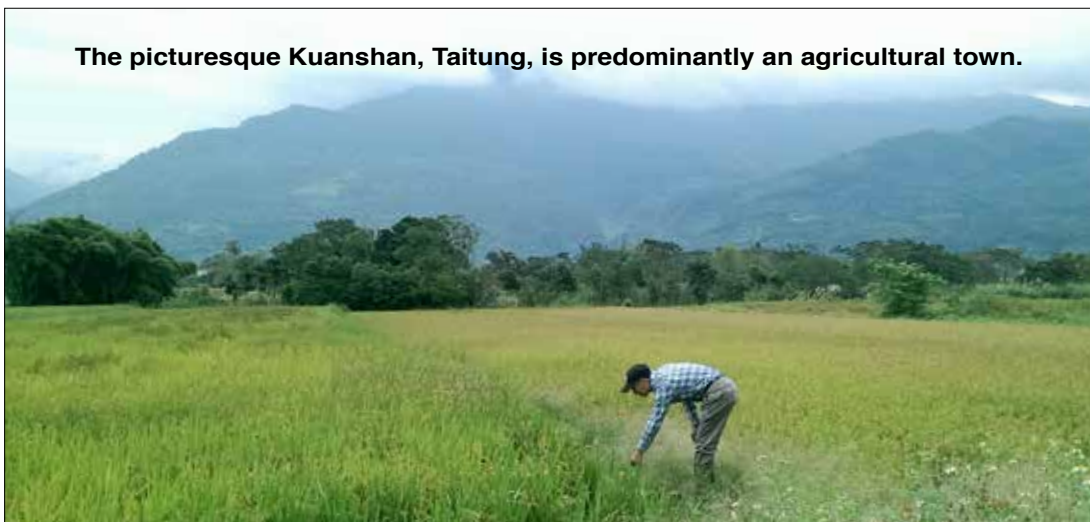
like my stomach is bloated, and hurts sometimes?”

“I am always troubled by indigestion. Doctor, is there any effective cure to make my stomach better?”

“Every time I finish a meal, it hurts just below my heart. Do I have a heart problem?”

“I can't stop burping after a meal, sometimes with acid too. Is my stomach inflamed?”

**The picturesque Kuanshan, Taitung, is predominantly an agricultural town.**





Whenever a patient complains like that, it is almost a guarantee that they have erratic eating schedule, particularly during farming seasons where they tend to eat faster and simpler, imbalanced diet, hard labor right after a meal, and the frequent bending that causes compression to the stomach. TCM believes that liver governs tendon, the stiffness in tendons from intense labor can bring harm to the liver meridian. The liver meridian route “arrives within the lesser abdomen, passes along the sides of the stomach, joins with the livers, nets with the gallbladder, ascends through the diaphragm, and spreads along the (inside) of the rib sides”, hence any damage to liver would impede the digestive function of stomach.

### **Diagnose Stomach Functions by Direct Observation**

Spleen and stomach are the foundation of acquired constitution, corresponds to earth in the five elements of TCM. I often tell my patients that good crops require good soil, a simple logic that all farmers comprehend. By the same principle, stomach corresponds to earth, possesses the same life-nurturing essence as the earth we know. Humans walk on this earth for survival,

and similarly, all of our diet, including liquid, food, and medicine, have to travel through stomach for digestion and absorption. A healthy body, therefore, require a solid cultivation of stomach soil.

“Doctor, how do I know if my stomach is fine?” Some patients would ask.

By observing the exterior of our body, we can conduct a preliminary diagnosis on the conditions of our digestive system. Some of the common symptoms include cracked or swollen lips, purple lips with no luster, swollen nose with sharpened tip, cheek depression, upper abdomen bulging, left flanking area protrusion, disproportionate waist length, flaccid hand and feet muscle, and thigh swelling. These are manifestations of abnormalities in the digestive system, frail or stagnated spleen and stomach.

Once these symptoms begin to manifest, leaving them untreated can have consequences. In meridian circulation, the stomach meridian begins at nose and eyes, follow hairline and ascends to forehead, passing through neck all the way down to heart, and extend to toes. In other words, once stomach is ill, the entire stomach meridians would be affected. Headache, facial nerve paralysis, dry eyes, nose allergies, neck stiffness,



lower back pain, chest pain, poor reproductive system, cold limbs, toe cramps and etc, are the complications of stomach disease, all the way from head to toe.

### **Chew Properly and Eat Moderately**

“Doctor, why is my stomach so bad? I always eat normally!” a grandma said innocently.

Majority of gastrointestinal issues, excluding hereditary, stress, and poor posture, are caused by diet. Eating regularly is not the only issue we should be concerned of, mood swings, eating order, food types, speed and post-meal rest can all have an impact.

Those with bloating issues should reduce the intake of beans, green pepper, sweet potato, potato and food that is rich in fiber, and avoid tea, coffee, milk, and eggs. Yams, lilies, burdock, brown rice, and camellia oil would certain help. One should avoid pressurizing one’s stomach after a meal by bending down, propping feet up, sleeping face down, or sit in semi recumbent position to prevent indigestion.

“So eating fast is bad for my stomach? How slow is normal then?” a grandpa asked.

Chewing is vita in the digestive process, as it initiates a preliminary

digestion by mixing food with saliva, which reduces the burden of stomach. A meal lasts approximately 20 min, eating slowly, chew ten times per bite is ideal, or more when eating food that are harder to digest. Be cautious, avoid drinking too much soup or water during a meal. For soup noodle, drink soup first, follow by garnishes, and end of noodles to enhance satisfaction. For those with frail stomach functions, reverse the process by eating noodles first and ending with soup.

Some people prefer frequent meals



**Aside from dietary recuperation, Dr. Chen I-Wen recommends everyone to cultivate their stomach through stomach meridian acupressure.**



in smaller portions, enjoy desserts outside regular meals. In reality, unless it is a doctor's recommendation, frequent eating can overburden stomach and affect dental hygiene. Some people like a piece of soda cracker there is not enough time to eat. The main ingredient of soda crackers is flour, which can elevate blood sugar and inhibit hunger, reducing damages of acid to stomach wall. However, regular dietary routine is the only way to preserve stomach health.

Now that we have established the fact that diet causes majority of stomach issues, how do we protect our stomach from harm?

First, eat to three-quarter full only to reduce burdens on stomach, a step that is vital in the cultivation of stomach. Second, eat with close friends in a comfy environment. TCM believes that mood is associated with heart and liver, any stress and tension can adversely affect stomach digestion. Keeping a good mood is the way to a healthy gastrointestinal mechanism. Eating warm and delicious food can better one's mood, while hunger does the complete opposite.

### **Abdominal Breath and Acupressure**

Aside from dietary recuperation to enhance constitution, abdominal

breathing and "stomach meridian acumassage" daily can contribute to the regulation of stomach.

Abdominal breathing: breath out through the nose (~3 sec), breath in through the nose (~3 sec), and breath out again through the nose (~6 sec). Remember to contract the abdomen while breathing. By breathing in and out, the abdomen rise and fall, facilitates digestion, improve circulation, and relief lower back pain. Furthermore, knock (or beat) along the pressure points of the stomach meridian can help with releasing toxins and relaxation.

According to the statistics on national cancer incidence rate published by the Health Promotion Administration (HPA), in 2011, colorectal cancer clinched the top of the list. However, in regards to the national incidence rate of gastric cancer, Taitung County was ranked 4th among other 19 cities and counties. The high incidence rate is of course associated with the local dietary culture. Majority of the residents in eastern Taiwan are farmers who eat extremely fast to save time for farm work, which, over a longer period of time, can give rise to gastrointestinal disease.



## Recipes of Stomach Cultivation

### Melon and Watermelon Peel Tea

**Ingredients :** Melon 300 g, watermelon peel 150 g (remove red pulp from peel, then remove green outer layer), muscovado sugar or light brown sugar 450 g, few pieces of indigenous cinnamon.

**Cookware :** Instant pot, smoldering pot, blender

**Method :**

1. Wash melon, watermelon peel, and indigenous cinnamon.
2. Slice the melon with the skin into thin slices, add muscovado sugar, stir fully for 10 minutes.
3. Place 2) into instant pot, add the watermelon peel, bring it to a boil and turn off the heat. Wait overnight.
4. Remove the melon & watermelon peel extract, put it into blender and blend. Package separately.
5. Take a small portion, add water to dilute. Add few pieces of indigenous cinnamon and is ready for drinking.

### Lotus Leaf Rice Porridge

**Ingredients :** Fresh lotus leaf 50 g, wolfberry leaf 50 g, ginger 3~5 slices, rice 100 g, water 1,200 g.

**Method :**

1. Wash and dice lotus leaves, wolfberry leaves, ginger. Wash rice for later.
2. Place water and rice into pot, bring it to a boil.
3. Add wolfberry leaves and ginger when boiled, turn heat to low and cook for 40 minutes.
4. Add lotus leaves and stir, simmer for 5 minutes, add salt to taste.