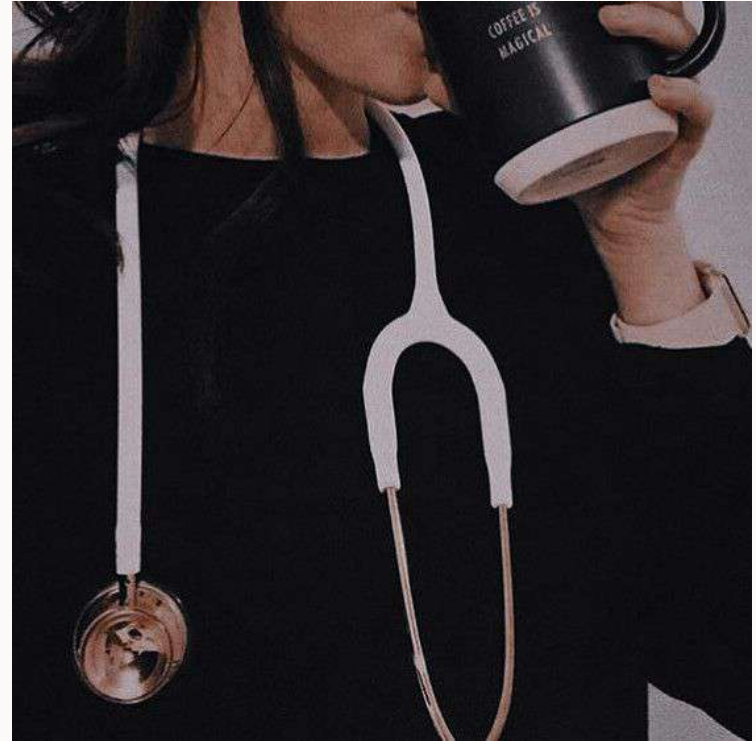


# Caring for the Carers: A Wellness Guide for Nurses

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# PREFACE

I created this wellness guide for myself and other nurses. Those working in the health care sector face extraordinary demands and also have the ability to positively influence the long term wellbeing of their patients.

Health affects every aspect of our lives. Our energy levels, our feelings of wellbeing and our relationships. How can we expect caregivers to look after patients and loved ones if they are neglecting themselves.

It has never been more important to share knowledge of how an holistic approach to nutrition and lifestyle habits has a profound affect on our physical and mental health.

This guide will set out simple steps to ensure we have a strong foundation of health and to tackle burn out, or in Traditional Chinese Medicine, kidney qi deficiency - so vital for a busy nurses lifestyle to rise to all the life throws our way.



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# NURSES HEALTH

A nurse's role as a caregiver is both physically and emotionally taxing. Nurses often work a mix of day and night 12 hour shifts, working these hours with infrequent and poor quality meal choices, insufficient toilet breaks and little exposure to sunlight and fresh air.

Chronic stress is becoming more apparent for nurses and can lead to common health conditions such as inflammation, anxiety, digestive issues, poor quality sleep and low mood. The Department of Health in England has estimated that 21% of health care professionals are obese.

High role expectations and difficult working conditions place some nurses at risk of burnout and stress-related illness including adrenal fatigue and HPA axis dysregulation.

The HPA axis governs our intermediate to long term stress response. It regulates the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal glands which play a role in metabolism, body temperature, circadian rhythm, hormonal health and thyroid function. Cortisol is the main hormone released by the adrenals to help the body recover from the effects of stress.

When stress becomes chronic the body has mechanisms to try to protect it from the effects of high cortisol produced in this stress response. As part of this protection, the brain decreases the HPA axis and prevents the adrenals receiving signals to produce cortisol in future stress. This leads to low levels of cortisol and can lead to fatigue.



# NURSES HEALTH

The chinese medicine approach to explain adrenal fatigue is kidney qi deficiency. When we try to function without adequate fuel or we push through fatigue barriers we dip into our Kidney Qi for energy. Stress, overconsumption of sugar and refined carbs, alcohol and caffeine will also cause a release of Kidney Qi. When we use up our kidney qi we are dipping into our ageing potential.

Typical nurses' lifestyles burn their Kidney Qi on a regular basis ultimately resulting in a depletion of Kidney Yin and Yang. This eventually results in an imbalance in every system of the body especially hormonal, emotional and energetic.



# EAT

Busy schedules, irregular shift patterns and constant work demands take a heavy toll on a nurse's digestion and eating habits. Time poor nurses who miss out on preparing nutritious home cooked meals turn to hospital canteens that offer little whole food options. This can lead to an increase in the consumption of refined carbohydrates, sugar and poor quality fats.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, a strong and nourished digestive system is at the heart of optimum health. TCM does not follow a one diet fits all approach, rather eating for one's constitution can help correct any pathological imbalance through diet. The main aim for everyone is to nourish the stomach and the spleen through warm, cooked and easy to digest naturally sweetened food.

**AIM:** Eat to nurture digestion and to heal a group of symptoms from adrenal fatigue, inflammation and kidney qi deficiency.



# EAT

## GOOD EATING HABITS FOR NURSES:

- TCM follows a body clock that outlines the energetic flow from paired yin and yang organs. Following this clock, we are mindful of how we eat, work and exercise and sleep to make the most out of our day. Furthermore, the spleen and stomach work best at certain times of the day:
- Warm nutrient dense breakfast :  
7am-9am
  - Nutrient balanced lunch: 11am-1pm
  - Smaller whole food dinner: 5pm - 7pm

When possible sit down to eat and be mindful of what you are doing while you are eating. Paying attention to the task of eating helps improve digestion and increases awareness of feeling full.

Avoid drinking fluids before or during a meal so digestive function is strong and not watered down.



# EAT

## **Irregular shifts and diet:**

As mentioned previously, the nature of nursing involves irregular shift patterns and this needs to be taken into account in order to maintain healthy eating.

Nurses could try consuming several smaller meals throughout their shift.

It is most beneficial for food to be anti-inflammatory and ensure that blood sugars remain stable to heal burn out.

Working night shift negatively affects health and can increase the risk of heart disease, heart attacks, depression and obesity. Staying up at night for work requires more energy than day time hours and requires more effort to nurture digestion and overall well being. It is important to eat frequent small meals that are easy to digest and won't spike blood sugar levels. Bone broth and warm teas would be desirable during a night shift.





<b>FOODS TO INCLUDE</b>	<b>FOODS TO AVOID</b>
Warm cooked foods	Cold raw foods
Warm drinks such as warm herbal tea, adaptogenic elixirs	Cold drinks such as iced smoothies
Whole, unprocessed foods	Sugar, highly refined flour, processed and packaged foods
Good quality fats example - grass fed butter, extra virgin olive oil, organic coconut oil	Vegetable oil, trans fats, margarine
Grass fed and organic animal protein	Cold processed meats such as salami
Overnight soaked grains	Refined carbohydrates found in most store bought muesli, boxed cereals
Matcha latte or green tea	Coffee - Aim for no more than one a day
Bone broth	
Overnight soaked dried beans including black beans and chickpeas	Canned beans containing BPA
	Alcohol
Anti inflammatory herbs and spices - cinnamon, turmeric and ginger	Overly spicy herbs such as chilli
Pre and probiotic foods, such as grass fed butter and kimchi	

# RECIPES



# Miso Soup

To moisten and nourish the organs and tissues

## Ingredients

- 8 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stems discarded and sliced
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1/3 cup finely chopped scallions (3-4 scallions roughly)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons grated ginger
- Sprigs of thyme
- 5 cups (1.25 L) water
- 2 cups (2 ounces roughly) packed baby spinach
- 1 tablespoon tamari or soy sauce, plus more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Strip of kombu seaweed



Adapted from

<https://www.abeautifulplate.com>

Ready in **40 minutes**

## Instructions:

1. Prepare the mushrooms by removing the stems and cleaning with a damp cloth or paper towel. Then slice the mushrooms.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the mushrooms and a few pinches of salt and stir. Let the mushrooms cook until soft, about 5 minutes, stirring only occasionally. Add the scallions, garlic, ginger and sprigs of thyme and cook 1 more minute. Add the water and strip of kombu and bring to a low simmer. Scoop some of the simmer water into a small bowl and add the miso paste, stirring until it dissolves, then add it back into the soup pot. Simmer over low heat for 15 minutes.
3. Add the spinach, tamari (or soy sauce, if using), sesame oil, rice vinegar, and red pepper flakes. Stir until the spinach is wilted. Remove strips of kombu. Season to taste with tamari and a drizzle of toasted sesame oil.



# Red dhal with coconut milk

Red lentils tonify Qi - energy



Adapted from

<https://www.foodandwine.com>

Ready in **40 minutes**

Serves **2 people**

## Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 2 onions, halved and thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh ginger
- 2 small fresh red chiles, thinly sliced
- 1 quart chicken stock or broth
- One 14-ounce can unsweetened coconut milk
- 2 cups red lentils, picked over (13 ounces)
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro stems, plus chopped leaves for garnish
- 1/2 pound kale, stemmed and leaves coarsely chopped (4 cups)
- 1 1/2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice, plus lemon wedges for serving
- Sea salt
- Pepper

## Instructions:

- **Step 1**

In a large saucepan, heat 1 tablespoon of the coconut oil. Add the cumin, fennel and turmeric and cook over moderate heat, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons of coconut oil and the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 6 to 7 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger and half of the sliced chiles and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Spoon half of the spiced onion mixture into a small bowl and reserve.

- **Step 2**

Add the chicken stock, coconut milk, red lentils and cilantro stems to the saucepan and bring to a simmer. Cook over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are tender, about 20 minutes. Add the kale and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice and season with salt and pepper.

- **Step 3**

Spoon the dal into bowls. Top with the reserved onion mixture and the remaining sliced chiles. Garnish with chopped cilantro and serve with lemon wedges



# Miso glazed salmon one pan bake

To tonify Qi -  
energy

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons white miso paste
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ginger, grated
- pepper, to taste
- 3 oz salmon(85 g), 2 fillets
- ½ bunch asparagus, trimmed
- 1 large baby bok choy, halved lengthwise
- olive oil, to taste
- salt, to taste
- brown rice, cooked, for serving, optional
- sesame seed, for garnish

## Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C) and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a small bowl, combine the miso paste, honey, rice vinegar, garlic, ginger, and pepper. Whisk until smooth.
3. Place the salmon fillets skin-side down in the center of the prepared baking sheet and brush generously with the miso-honey sauce.
4. Lay the asparagus on one side of the salmon and the baby bok choy on the other side. Drizzle the vegetables with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Rub the vegetables until evenly coated.
5. Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until the salmon is cooked to your liking.
6. Divide the vegetables and salmon between serving plates, with rice alongside if desired. Garnish the salmon with sesame seeds and serve immediately.
7. Enjoy!

Adapted from  
<https://tasty.co/recipe/one-pan-miso-honey-salmon-for-two>

# Quinoa veggie bowls with kimchi

quinoa tonifies Qi and

strengthen the whole body

## Ingredients

- 1/2 cup quinoa, dry (or use 1.5 cups cooked)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1-2 bunch(es) broccolini (or other vegetable of choice)
- 2 handfuls baby spinach
- 2 tsp tamari
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp kimchi liquid (from jar)
- Approx. 1/2 cup raw kimchi (use half to cook + half for topping)
- Protein of choice: fried eggs, pan-fried tofu, tempeh, etc.
- Optional toppings: sesame seeds, toasted sesame seed oil, sliced avocado

## Instructions:

1. Cook quinoa according to package instructions. To make recipe in under 20 minutes, use pre-cooked quinoa!
2. Chop broccolini into one-inch pieces. You can use other veggies if desired (e.g. asparagus, broccoli, zucchini, green beans, etc.)
3. Heat a pan to medium, add olive oil. Sauté broccolini for 5-7 minutes, until slightly tender. Add baby spinach, and cook until wilted.
4. Add cooked quinoa, tamari, sesame seed oil, garlic powder, half the kimchi, and kimchi liquid to pan. Sauté everything for a few minutes. Once done, set aside.
5. Meanwhile, prepare your protein of choice (e.g. eggs, tofu, etc). Serve kimchi-quinoa mixture alongside protein, and top with extra kimchi, and additional toppings as desired. Enjoy!

Adapted from

<https://www.walderwellness.com/kimchi-quinoa-bowl/>



# Bean Salad

Particularly black beans

help to treat feelings of a lack in vitality

## Ingredients

- 1 cup dried beans
- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp white wine vinegar
- 1 Tsp sugar
- 2 Tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 Tbsp chopped tarragon
- 1 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- Seasonal vegetables
- Optional toppings: sesame seeds, toasted sesame seed oil, sliced avocado, oily fish

## Instructions:

1. Soak dry beans overnight with 6 cups of water.
2. Discard the water then boil vigorously with 6 cups of replaced water for ten minutes then simmer for 1-1.5 hours.
3. Set beans aside to cool and prepare seasonal salad vegetables like radishes and red onions.
4. Make the dressing by mixing olive oil, white wine vinegar, sugar, dijon mustard, tarragon and parsley.
5. Serve with an oily fish, sliced avocado and seasonal vegetables



# A DAY ON A PLATE FOR A NURSE

## **Breakfast:**

Overnight soaked oats with goji berries and toasted pumpkin seeds

Boiled eggs on sourdough toast

## **Lunch:**

Leftover beef stew with root vegies

Grilled chicken with hummus on a wholemeal wrap

## **Dinner:**

Chicken soup

Miso glazed salmon with seasonal vegies

## **Snacks:**

Roasted nuts

Dried fruit

Good quality dark chocolate

## **Tonics and herbal teas**

Calming nerve tonics

Coffee addicts elixir

Oat straw tea

Nettle tea

Green tea

## **Supplements:**

Magnesium glycinate, Vit d, zinc, ashwaganda, siberian ginseng



# MOVE



Exercise is imperative for health. It promotes blood flow and releases endorphins that clears our mind and lifts our mood. Regular exercise helps to maintain a healthy body weight, reduces risk of disease, boosts immunity and improves physical and mental wellbeing. Similarly, when we move we generate digestive fire which allows food to be transformed into blood.

Making physical activity a priority can be achieved by incorporating incidental daily exercise such as walking or cycling to work.

Vigorous exercise can be an antidote to feeling frustrated whereas exhaustion requires more nourishing movement through pilates or yoga.

The aim should be to sit down less and move more daily and incorporate this into our everyday routine.

# MOVE

Just 20 minutes of movement can have a positive effect on your brain chemistry.

Make it fun and challenging through strength training using resistance bands and weights.

There is an abundance of free workout videos on youtube, or you can pay for a subscription to support the fitness industry.



# MIND



Practicing mindfulness and gratitude can help combat stress and adrenal fatigue. Breathing exercises can help reduce the stress response and return the body to a relaxed state.

Acupuncture can help adrenal fatigue by stimulating points in the body associated with the kidney.

Taking regular breaks can be difficult in the nursing profession so it is important in down time to participate in activities that bring joy and raise positive vibrations.

An example of a simple breathing exercise to reduce stress:

This technique is known as **box breathing**

1. Breathe in for four seconds. Hold for four seconds
2. Breathe out for four seconds. Hold for four seconds
3. Repeat

# REST



The body heals itself when we sleep so good quality sleep is imperative to reduce adrenal fatigue and improve kidney energy.

Eating an anti inflammatory diet not only heals adrenals but also can encourage good quality sleep. Ensuring blood sugars remain stable and reducing caffeine and alcohol can also help ensure sleep is uninterrupted.

In TCM, it is advised that drinks and food are not consumed after 7pm and that we should be asleep by 10pm. At this time the organ systems can rest and repair.

For night shift workers it is important to keep a consistent sleep routine. Black out blinds and ear plugs to reduce noise from the day can help.

Another tip is to wake up to morning sunlight. This helps to regulate the sleep hormone, melatonin which promotes healthy sleep and helps to orient our circadian rhythm.

# REST

## 15 tips for a healthy sleep regime

1. Establish a regular waking and bed time.
2. Do not exceed 45 minutes of daytime sleep.
3. Reduce your fluid intake before bed
4. Avoid excessive alcohol and nicotine ingestion four hours before bedtime.
5. Avoid caffeine six hours before bedtime.
6. Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods four hours before bedtime.
7. Do not exercise right before bed.
8. Wind down for at least 30 minutes. Try reading, gentle yoga and relaxation exercises.
9. Choose quality bedding to support comfort and spine.
10. Find a comfortable sleep temperature.
11. Block out all distracting noise and eliminate as much light as possible.
12. Reserve your bed for sleep, avoiding its use for work.
13. Try natural calming aromas, such as lavender, to help you ease into sleep.
14. Limit exposure to bright light in the evenings.
15. Turn off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.



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