

YIN SHI

OSTEO-ARTICULAR

Osteoarthritis

Chinese dietetics protocol sheet

A joint that wears is not a mechanical part that dulls: it is living tissue that the terrain either nourishes or lets dry out. Chinese medicine reads osteoarthritis as a Bi syndrome (痹) that has finally reached the bone: a painful obstruction of cold, dampness or stasis, laid over Kidneys and a Liver that no longer fill the marrow or the blood of the tendons. Treating the branch without nourishing the root lasts one winter at most.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is the degeneration of articular cartilage with remodelling of the subchondral bone: the cartilage thins, the bone densifies in counterpoint, osteophytes form at the margins and the joint loses its glide. Modern medicine no longer reads it as simple wear: it is an active disease in which low-grade inflammation, mechanical load, metabolic terrain and the ageing of chondrocytes feed one another. TCM places it in the chapter of Bi syndromes (痹), painful obstructions in which Wind, Cold and Dampness freeze the circulation of the meridians; when the obstruction settles in and the root weakens, the Bi descends towards the bone and becomes bone Bi (gu ˇ bì 骨痹): the Kidney no longer fills the marrow, the Liver no longer fattens the tendons, and cold-dampness lodges itself in an empty terrain. Western diagnosis names the joint; the MTC differential names the terrain, and it is the terrain that writes the dietary plan.

SUGGESTIVE SIGNS

- Mechanical pain: it increases with exertion and eases with rest, the opposite of inflammatory pain
- Brief morning start-up stiffness, generally under half an hour
- Cracking, a sensation of sand or grating inside the joint
- Classic worsening with damp cold and changes in the weather
- Moderate swelling, sometimes an effusion after excessive exertion
- Progressive loss of range, the last degrees of flexion disappearing
- Finger nodules (Heberden, Bouchard) in digital osteoarthritis
- Knees, hips, hands, spine: the most frequent sites

TONGUE & PULSE

Varies with the pattern: pale tongue with a moist white coating and a taut pulse in cold-dampness; swollen tongue with a greasy coating and a slippery pulse in dampness; red tongue with a yellow coating and a rapid pulse during a flare; pale or red tongue depending on the Yin-Yang side and a deep thin pulse in deficiencies; purplish tongue and a rough pulse in stasis. See the differential.

FAVOURABLE TERRAIN

A terrain of long standing: years of mechanical load (work on one's feet, impact sport, excess weight), an old joint trauma, menopause or Kidney ageing, a diet that burdens (sugars, dairy, fried foods) or that empties (harsh fasting, excess spice). The Bi settles where movement has worn the joint and where the plate has let the terrain degrade.

THE TCM DIFFERENTIAL

Which pattern applies?

Osteoarthritis does not exist in the singular: the same worn joint can carry a cold that freezes, a dampness that swells, a heat that flares up, or a deficiency that lets the bone grow rare. The MTC reading distinguishes the branch, the Bi that obstructs, from the root, the terrain that lets the Bi settle: in practice the two almost always combine, and the dietary plan corrects the branch while restoring the root.

TCM PATTERN	DISTINCTIVE SIGNS	TONGUE & PULSE	QUICK SIGNAL
Wind-Cold-Dampness obstruction	Erratic or fixed, intense pain, clearly improved by heat, aggravated by damp cold, local sensation of cold	Pale tongue, moist white coating; taut, wiry or tight pulse	***Pain that migrates or freezes and that heat relieves***
Stagnant Dampness (heavy Bi)	Joint heaviness, numbness, swelling with effusion, worsening in wet weather	Swollen tongue, thick greasy white coating; slippery, soft pulse	***The knee that fills, the whole body that weighs***
Heat Bi (flare)	Red, hot, swollen joint, painful to touch: the inflammatory flare	Red tongue, yellow coating; slippery, rapid pulse	***Local redness and heat: the flare, not the background***
Kidney Yang deficiency	Chronic dull pain, marked chilliness, weak back and knees, worse in the morning and in winter, better with heat	Pale, moist tongue; deep, weak, slow pulse	***Body cold that descends as far as the bones***
Kidney Yin deficiency	Dry stiffness, pain late in the day and at night, hot palms, night sweats, tinnitus	Red tongue, scant or no coating, sometimes cracked; thin, rapid pulse	***The dry grating, the night that wakes you***
Liver Blood deficiency	Prolonged morning stiffness, cramps and spasms, numbness, dry tendons that no longer fatten	Pale tongue; thin, wiry pulse	***Dry tendons, cramps that answer to rest***
Kidney Essence Jing deficiency (bone Bi)	Deep, progressive degeneration, slow deformities, weakening teeth and hair, the whole body ageing	Pale or red tongue depending on the Yin-Yang side; deep, thin pulse	***Bone growing rare with the years, not the cold of one winter***
Spleen Qi deficiency	Excess weight, fatigue after meals, general heaviness, loose stools, dampness the body manufactures	Pale, scalloped tongue, moist coating; empty, soft pulse	***The knee bearing the weight of a tired Spleen***
Blood stasis with knotted Phlegm	Fixed stabbing pain, worse at night, finger nodules, established deformities	Purplish tongue or purple spots; rough, wiry pulse	***Pain that no longer moves, the joint that deforms***

In practice branch and root combine: Kidney deficiency lets the cold in, Spleen deficiency manufactures the dampness that stagnates, stasis comes when the obstruction hardens. Read the dominant pattern first through the signs, then combine: most chronic osteoarthritis calls for nourishing the deficiency below while dispersing what obstructs above, never one without the other. A rarer associated pattern: combined Qi and Blood deficiency (dull pain aggravated by exertion, marked fatigue in the elderly) folds into the plans of Liver Blood and Spleen Qi. And one paradox worth reading: condensed dairy nourishes Yin and Essence in deficiencies, but manufactures Dampness in obstructions: same food, two patterns, two verdicts.

DIETARY PLANS

One plan per pattern

1 Wind-Cold-Dampness obstruction · *fēng hán shī bì* 风寒湿痹 *(xíng bì* 行痹 */ tòng bì* 痛痹*)*

The external branch of Bi: cold freezes and produces fixed, intense pain (tòng bì), wind makes the pain wander from joint to joint (xíng bì), dampness weighs. The telltale sign: heat relieves, damp cold aggravates. Strategy: warm-pungent that disperses and sweet that holds the centre, never dispersing to the point of emptying.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Job's Tears	Cool	Sweet	Drives out wind and controls dampness, loosens cramped tendons	*The grain of the ancients against Bi: in congee with a little ginger to offset its coolness.*
Fresh Ginger	Warm	Pungent	Disperses Wind-Cold and warms the meridians	*Three slices in soup or infusion: the daily routine against cold that lodges itself.*
Cinnamon	Hot	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the meridians and moves Blood in the cold	*The stick in porridge or infusion: the fire that crosses the joint.*
Turmeric	Warm	Bitter, Pungent	Moves Qi and Blood, loosens the painful obstruction	*The daily pinch, always with a turn of black pepper: the painkiller with its clinical trials.*
Garlic	Warm	Pungent	Disperses cold and transforms dampness	*Raw crushed or gently confit: the everyday pungency that keeps cold at a distance.*
Onion	Warm	Sweet, Pungent	Moves Qi and drains dampness	*Melting in every stew: the aromatic base that circulates without exhausting.*
Sichuan Pepper	Hot	Pungent	Drives out cold and dampness, numbs the pain	*A few pounded grains in northern damp-weather dishes: the speciality of Bi in cold regions.*
Oats	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Strengthens Qi and drains dampness gently	*The morning porridge: the warmth of the bowl that prepares the joint for a cold day.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Cold, raw plates in the cold season	Cold	Raw food cools the centre when outer cold is already freezing the meridians: midday salads in winter should be suspended.
Abundant dairy	Variable	Milk, yoghurts and fresh cheeses engender the dampness that weighs down Bi: keep them for dry terrains, not here.
Fried foods and congealed fats	Variable	They burden the Spleen and thicken dampness in meridians already obstructed.
Fatty sweets	Variable	Fatty sugar is the fastest dampness factory: the afternoon pastry comes to swell the joint.
Excess hot pungency	Hot	Chilli disperses violently then exhausts: it relieves for twenty minutes and makes the obstruction rebound.

GOLDEN RULE

What disperses must be held: warm-pungent opens the meridians, the sweetness of the grain holds the centre, and dispersion stops when the pain yields, not before.

MODERN NUTRITION

Ginger: the meta-analysis of randomised trials (Osteoarthritis Cartilage 2015, PMID 25300574) shows a modest but real effect on osteoarthritis pain; kitchen ginger joins the classical use. Curcumin: recent meta-analyses (Phytother Res 2024, PMID 38576215) bring it close to NSAIDs on pain, and the trial combining turmeric-pepper-ginger matched naproxen (PMID 32180294). Black pepper is essential: it multiplies curcumin bioavailability.

2 Stagnant Dampness, the heavy Bi · *zhuó bì* 着痹

Dampness settling into the joint: heaviness, numbness, swelling, and the classic sign of gonarthrosis, the effusion that fills the knee. Wet weather aggravates, the whole body weighs. This is the pattern of a joint drinking water that the Spleen no longer evacuates.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Job's Tears	Cool	Sweet	Drains dampness and loosens tendons, the grain of Bi par excellence	*In soup or congee several times a week: the water in the knee is looking for a way out.*
Barley	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen and brings water out gently	*In pearl barley soup or barley water: the grain for swollen terrains that wants nothing brutalised.*
Adzuki	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Drains dampness and moves Blood	*The classic azuki soup: the bean that deflates without emptying.*
Corn (silk and stigma)	Neutral	Sweet	Promotes urination and drains dampness gently	*Corn silk infusion, sweet and almost tasteless: the background drainage of effusions.*
Celery	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Drains dampness and clarifies nascent heat	*Stalks in soups or morning juice: the vegetable for heavy joints.*
Courgette	Frais	Sweet	Eliminates water and cools gently	*Braised: the light everyday drainage, never too cold for the centre.*
Daikon : Chinese Radish	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Transforms phlegm and brings down what stagnates	*Daikon braised in soups: the mild pungency that lifts lodged dampness.*
Rice	Neutral	Sweet	The neutral anchor that holds the Spleen while the others drain	*The evening congee: the neutrality that allows daily drainage without exhausting anything.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Dairy and fresh milk products	Variable	The first dampness factory of the Western plate: milk, yoghurts and white cheeses fill the knee.
Refined sugars and sugary drinks	Variable	Fast sugar engenders dampness and feeds the metabolic inflammation that swells the joint.
Cured meats and salted foods	Variable	Salt retains the water the Spleen is trying to expel: the charcuterie of the apéritif weighs down the evening leg.
Fried foods and saturated fats	Variable	They thicken dampness and weigh the whole body as much as the joint.

GOLDEN RULE

Drain without exhausting: the sweet grains bring water out, the neutral anchor holds the centre, and the Spleen that recovers its filter finishes the work the infusion begins.

MODERN NUTRITION

Weight is the major lever: the IDEA trial (JAMA 2013, PMID 24065013) showed that diet and exercise reduced pain and IL-6 in knee osteoarthritis, and every kilo lost relieves the joint of several kilos of load. Effusions respond to the low-grade inflammation that metabolic terrain modulates: the review of dietary facts and myths (Nutrients 2025, PMID 40507141) confirms the role of sugars and ultra-processed foods.

3 Heat Bi, the flare · *rè bì* 热痹

When the stagnant obstruction heats up: the joint turns red, hot, swollen, painful at the slightest touch. This is the inflammatory flare of osteoarthritis, and also the vigilance threshold: an isolated, brutal joint heat requires the medical diagnosis that rules out gout and septic arthritis. Strategy: the cool that drains and the bitter that clarifies, never the iced that would create a new Bi.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Job's Tears	Cool	Sweet	Drains dampness and clarifies heat without freezing	*Cold in a grain salad or warm in soup: the coolness that extinguishes without icing.*
Buckwheat	Cold	Sweet	Clarifies heat and eliminates dampness	*Kasha or buckwheat galette: the grain of flares that puts out fire without exhausting.*
Celery	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Drains water and cools rising heat	*Morning celery juice or stalks in soup: the vegetable of the hot flare.*
Eggplant, Aubergine	Cold	Sweet	Clarifies heat and moves Blood	*Roasted or steamed with a thread of cold-pressed oil: the fresh vegetable that circulates, a rare combination.*
Pineapple	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Aids digestion and helps drain dampness	*Fresh at the end of a meal: its bromelain is the enzyme research suspects of calming joints.*
Wild celery : ache des marais	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Clarifies heat and eliminates stagnant dampness	*In soup or juice: the wild version of celery, more bitter and more clarifying.*
Black radish	Cool, Neutral	Pungent, Sweet	Brings heat down and transforms dampness	*Grated with oil and lemon: the fresh pungency that brings the fire of the flare down.*
Vervain	Cool	Bitter	Cools and calms the agitation of the flare	*The evening infusion on hot days: the gentle bitterness that extinguishes without stiffening.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Grilled red meats	Hot	Dry, hot cooking adds fire to fire: the flare's barbecue relights the joint.
Hot spices	Hot	Chilli, cinnamon and pepper in strong doses pour oil on the embers: resume them only after the flare.
Fried foods	Variable	Hot oil concentrates damp-heat: the evening doughnuts keep the joint alight.
Fast sugars	Variable	Sugar feeds the heat and inflammation of the flare: desserts wait until the crisis passes.

GOLDEN RULE

Put out the flare without freezing the terrain: the cool that drains and the bitter that clarifies do the work of icing, without the cold that would close the Bi back up.

MODERN NUTRITION

Omega-3: the 2024 review (Nutrients, PMID 38892583) recalls that their metabolites (resolvins) modulate joint inflammation; sardines and mackerel are part of it. Pineapple bromelain: evidence remains weak but usage matches the logic of the flare. Mediterranean-style diets are associated with fewer osteoarthritis symptoms (Nutrients 2018, PMID 30087302): the base of the flare is the overall cooling of the plate, not a miracle food.

4 Kidney Yang deficiency, cold osteoarthritis · *shèn yáng xū* 肾阳虚

The cold root: settled dull pain, marked chilliness, back and knees that buckle, worse in the morning and in winter, clearly relieved by heat. This is the osteoarthritis of the extinguished terrain, where the Kidney's hearth no longer warms the bones. Strategy: the gentle fire that lasts, long stews, warm spices, and nothing that ices the little flame remaining.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Mutton & lamb	Hot	Sweet, Salty	Warms Yang and nourishes Blood in depth	*Sunday navarin or tagine: the meat for cold bones, the one of the Dong Tian classic.*
Eel	Neutral	Sweet, Salty	Counters exhaustion, frees the meridians and repels damp Bi	*Braised or with greens: the fish the ancients gave to old bones that took on water.*
Walnut	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes the Kidney and Essence, fattens the bones	*A handful in the morning: the brain-shaped seed the corpus links to marrow.*
Prawn	Warm	Sweet	Warms Yang and moves Blood	*Sautéed with ginger: the marine heat that wakes cold meridians.*
Cinnamon	Hot	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the hearth and conducts fire towards the bones	*The stick in porridge or warm compote: the daily Yang.*
Dried Ginger	Warm	Pungent	Warms the centre and turns cold back	*The powder in soups: more lasting than fresh, it is the background fire.*
Chestnut	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes the Kidney and strengthens loins and knees	*The autumn chestnut soup: the fruit for loins that love winter.*
Quail (meat)	Neutral	Sweet	Supports the Kidney and strengthens tendons and bones	*Roasted or in sauce: the small poultry of the ancients, made for bodies that cool.*
Sardine	Neutral, Warm	Sweet	Nourishes the Kidney and drains gently	*Whole with their soft bones: the calcium and vitamin D of the whole fish.*
Fenugreek	Warm	Sweet, Bitter	Warms the Kidney and dissipates cold	*Seeds in mild curries: the spice of the lower back that winter ices over.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Raw and cold from the plate	Cold	Every iced mouthful asks the hearth for a fire it no longer has: raw is reserved for hot terrains.
Iced fruits and sorbets	Cold	Cold dessert sends cold straight down to the hearth that heats the bones: iced yoghurt is the false friend.
Cold drinks	Cold	The iced water of a meal puts out the little fire remaining: room-temperature water or broth instead.
Excess salt	Variable	Salt conducts to the Kidney but its excess injures it: cured meats and over-salted dishes tire the bone.
Excess refined foods	Variable	White flour and sugar burn the terrain without building anything: heat must come from the fire of the pot, not the spike.

GOLDEN RULE

A gentle fire that never goes out: long stews and warm spices heat the bone from below, where a single iced dish would undo a day of care.

MODERN NUTRITION

Vitamin D: deficiency is frequent in osteoarthritis patients and the trial meta-analysis (Int J Surg 2017, PMID 28797917) remains mixed on progression; the prudent course is to correct deficiency without overdosing. Whole sardines bring calcium, vitamin D and omega-3 in a single small fish. Sufficient protein protects the muscle mass that stabilises the joint, particularly as sarcopenia sets in (Clin Nutr 2024, PMID 39142111).

5 Kidney Yin deficiency, dry osteoarthritis · *shèn yīn xū* 肾阴虚

The root that dries: the joint grates for want of lubricant, pain rises late in the day and at night, the palms heat up, night sweats and tinnitus accompany. This is the osteoarthritis of menopause and of terrains that have burned their Yin running too hard. Strategy: moisten without engendering dampness, the cooked richness and the deep fat.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Black Sesame	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Kidney-Liver Yin and fattens the tendons	*Ground or as paste in congee: the grain the corpus describes as filling marrow and strengthening tendons and bones.*
Chicken egg	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Yin and Blood, fattens the whole body	*The runny yolk of the morning: the richness that fills without weighing.*
Pork	Cool	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Yin and fattens dryness	*The melting cuts in gentle cooking: the meat for bodies that dry out, not for fire.*
Mussel	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Kidney Yin and fattens the bones	*The moules marinières pot: marine Yin in its juice, the classic plate of the inner sea.*
Avocado	Cool	Sweet	Nourishes Yin and fattens the fluids	*By the spoonful with a little salt: the vegetable butter that lubricates the terrain.*
Yam	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Strengthens the Kidney and consolidates Essence	*Mashed or in soups: the deep root that fills without dispersing.*
Duck (meat)	Cold	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Yin and fattens the dryness of the five viscera	*Confit or duck with turnips: the cold meat that nourishes, for bones that heat up.*
Oyster	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Kidney Yin and fattens the Jing	*Fresh or poached: the late-autumn oyster, the seafood of Yin.*
Goat's Milk	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Yin and fattens the marrow	*Warm in the evening: the milk of creaking menopause, gentler than cow's milk.*
Okra	Cold	Sweet	Moistens and lubricates the joints of the terrain	*Its mucilage in soups: the texture a dry body asks for.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Coffee	Warm	The stimulant draws on the reserve and dries the Yin: every cup digs the evening grating deeper.
Grilling and dry cooking	Hot	The barbecue concentrates heat in the meat: the flare of dry osteoarthritis relights at the grill's fire.
Hot spices	Hot	Chilli and strong spices disperse the little Yin remaining: cinnamon for cold osteoarthritis is not for here.
Excess salt	Variable	Salt dries the fluids that lubricate: evening cured meats deepen thirst and night.

GOLDEN RULE

Lubricate without clogging: deep fat cooked gently moistens the bones that Yin no longer waters, while the fires of the plate fall silent so the night can remake them.

MODERN NUTRITION

Cartilage is nearly 70% water and the sugar of rich diets stiffens its proteins through glycation: hydration and limited sugar are the base of suppleness. Vitamin C is the cofactor of collagen synthesis and the Framingham cohort associated it with reduced progression (Arthritis Rheum 1996, PMID 8630116). Collagen peptides have recent randomised trials (Front Nutr 2025, PMID 40977985): the richness of the pot and modern science meet here.

6 Liver Blood deficiency, tendons gone dry · *gān xuè xū* 肝血虚

The Liver stores blood and blood fattens the tendons: when it runs short, the tendons dry before the bones. Long morning stiffness, cramps, spasms, numbness of the extremities, pain that follows fatigue. This is the osteoarthritis of the tendon lacking food, not only of cartilage.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Beef liver	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes Liver Blood as a priority	*Once a week, gently sautéed: the food blood asks for when the tendons cry out.*
Cherry	Hot	Sweet	Nourishes Blood and warms gently	*The morning handful: the Blood fruit whose anthocyanins have their own osteoarthritis trials.*
Eel	Neutral	Sweet, Salty	Enriches Blood and frees the meridians	*With greens or braised: the fish of Blood that repairs worn tendons.*
Beef	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens Blood and fortifies tendons and bones	*Sunday pot-au-feu: the gentle meat that fills the blood of the tendons.*
Chicken egg	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Blood and Yin together	*The midday omelette: the everyday blood that asks for nothing exotic.*
Saffron	Neutral	Bitter	Nourishes Blood and moves it at the same time	*Fifteen stigmas in broth: the spice that nourishes blood without ever freezing it.*
Peach	Hot	Sweet, Sour	Nourishes Blood and moistens the tendons	*The evening fruit: its sweet flesh reminds us that blood is also nourished through sourness.*
Octopus	Cold	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Blood and fattens the terrain	*In daube or warm salad: the fish of blood for tendons that wear down.*
Raspberry	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Nourishes Blood and consolidates gently	*The dessert handful: the fruit that fills without cooling.*
Black Sesame	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Liver Blood and fattens the tendons	*The black paste in congee: the same grain as for Yin, because Blood and Yin nourish each other.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Coffee	Warm	The stimulant disperses the blood the body is trying to rebuild: the morning cup steals from the tendon.
Skipped meals and harsh fasting	Variable	Blood is made at the evening plate: skipping dinner leaves the tendons without food.
Strong dispersing pungents	Hot	Chilli and spices disperse blood already thin: keep them for stasis, not for deficiency.
Overtraining and late sport	Variable	Effort burns Liver blood: evening sport leaves the tendons hungry all night.

GOLDEN RULE

The blood that nourishes does not come from oil: it is the iron of offal and the depth of sleep that fill the tendons, and the night that fattens them.

MODERN NUTRITION

Collagen is the protein of tendons as much as of cartilage, and collagen peptides have shown effects on knee function in recent trials. UC-II, undenatured type II collagen, beat the glucosamine-chondroitin duo in a randomised trial (Nutr J 2016, PMID 26822714). Iron feeds the practitioner's blood and the patient's muscle fatigue: without it, the stabilising muscles cannot hold the joint.

7 Kidney Essence deficiency, bone Bi · *shèn jīng bù zú* 肾精不足 *(gu ˇ bì* 骨痹*)*

The root-pattern of osteoarthritis according to the Neijing: the Kidney engenders marrow which nourishes bone, and essence that runs out with age lets cartilage thin and bone densify in counterpoint. This is the Bi that has descended as far as the bone: deep degeneration, slow deformities, the whole body ageing with the joint.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Chicken egg	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Essence and marrow in depth	*The runny yolk of the morning: the embryo of the plate, the densest form of food essence.*
Venison (stag, hind, fawn)	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes Essence and strengthens bones	*The cold-season civet: the wild meat of the ancients for essence that runs low.*
Mussel	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Fills Essence and fattens bones	*The mussel juice taken by the spoonful: concentrated marine Yin descending towards the marrow.*
Walnut	Neutral	Sweet	Fills the Kidney and Essence, fattens the marrow	*The breakfast handful: the seed the corpus gave to old people wasting away in the bones.*
Pork kidney	Cold	Salty	Nourishes the Kidney by organ correspondence	*Quickly sautéed or in sauce: the Kidney offal tradition gives to essence that declines.*
Pigeon	Neutral	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Essence and strengthens tendons and bones	*Salmis or roast pigeon: the poultry of the old that bones love.*
Sheep's milk	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Fills the marrow and fattens essence	*Warm or in mild yoghurt: the milk of the mountains that shepherds kept for the elders.*
Black Sesame	Neutral	Sweet	Fills the marrow and brain, strengthens tendons and bones	*The evening paste in warm milk: the corpus grain that fills the marrow.*
Oyster	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes Essence and marine Yin	*The winter oyster: the sea descending towards the marrow of bones.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Excess coffee	Warm	The stimulant draws on the essence reserve like capital: every cup digs into the marrow.
Overwork and overtraining	Variable	Essence is spent by effort more than it is remade by the plate: the sport that exhausts bone instead of strengthening it.
Tobacco	Variable	It thins the blood and marrow the body is trying to fill: essence does not like smoke.
Cures and harsh fasting	Variable	Essence deficiency is not repaired by an empty plate: moderation, not abstinence.

GOLDEN RULE

Fill the marrow slowly: nothing rebuilds essence quickly, and it is the long-simmered bone broth that descends deepest into the bone.

MODERN NUTRITION

Bone broths bring glycine and proline, the amino acids of cartilage, and collagen peptides have their randomised trials (Front Nutr 2025, PMID 40977985). The calcium-vitamin D duo supports the subchondral bone, and whole sardines with their soft bones are the most complete plate here. Glucosamine and chondroitin: the GAIT trial (NEJM 2006, PMID 16495392) was overall negative, except in the subgroup of moderate to severe pain: the honest nuance, neither miracle nor disappointment.

8 Spleen Qi deficiency, the dampness factory · *pí qì xū* 脾气虚

The terrain that manufactures its own dampness: excess weight, fatigue after meals, general heaviness, stools that come undone. Every poorly transformed meal descends into the limbs and feeds the Bi from below: this is the metabolic phenotype of knee osteoarthritis, and the pattern where the plate makes the most difference.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Rice	Neutral	Sweet	The anchor that holds the centre and makes the morning congee	*The morning rice porridge: the centre that holds while the others work.*
Millet	Cool	Sweet, Salty	Strengthens the Spleen and supports the Kidney gently	*The evening millet congee: the grain of the loins that the Spleen digests without effort.*
Oats	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Strengthens Qi and drains dampness at the same time	*The morning porridge: the grain that fills without sticking, perfect for the tired Spleen.*
Pumpkin	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen and nourishes without burdening	*The evening pumpkin soup: the sweet vegetable the Spleen transforms into nothing.*
Carrot	Neutral	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen and nourishes the centre	*Grated or cooked: the sweet root that makes vegetable congee.*
Chicken	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens Qi and warms the centre	*The evening chicken broth: the meat for centres that weaken.*
Jujube	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen and soothes gently	*Two or three in the congee: the fruit of the centre the classic gives to the Spleen.*
Shiitake (mushroom)	Neutral	Sweet	Strengthens Qi and supports the centre	*In soups: the Qi mushroom that fills without weighing.*
Adzuki	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Strengthens the Spleen and drains the dampness it produces	*The azuki soup: the bean that repairs the Spleen's water leak.*
Pumpkin	Warm	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen and transforms dampness	*The pumpkin soup: the vegetable of the centre that melts fatigue.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Raw and cold from the plate	Cold	The tired Spleen no longer has the fire to transform raw food: every winter salad adds to the weight the knee carries.
Dairy and milk products	Variable	The most direct dampness factory of the plate: the evening yoghurt fills what the soup drains.
Sweets and fast sugars	Variable	Sugar tires the Spleen more than anything: the dessert that swells the knee of the next day.
Fried foods and fats	Variable	Oil extinguishes a Spleen already going out: the midday fat leaves the Spleen out of order for the evening.
Overly large meals	Variable	Quantity exhausts what quality tries to save: the overflowing table tires the Spleen as much as the knee.

GOLDEN RULE

The Spleen that transforms no longer produces dampness: congee first, kilos second, and the knee unloads without anything radical ever tiring the centre.

MODERN NUTRITION

Weight is the first lever: the IDEA trial (JAMA 2013, PMID 24065013) showed that weight loss combined with exercise reduced pain and IL-6 in knee osteoarthritis, and recent meta-analyses confirm (Osteoarthritis Cartilage 2025, PMID 39233046). The low glycaemic index steadies the practitioner's Spleen, and the fibres of whole grains feed the microbiome whose dialogue with joint inflammation is beginning to be documented.

9 Blood stasis with knotted Phlegm, deforming Bi · *xuè bì* 血痹 / *tán yū* 痰瘀

The chronic outcome: pain becomes fixed and stabbing, worse at night, fingers knot into Heberden and Bouchard nodules, the joint deforms. In MTC, stasis and phlegm knot together inside the joint, the famous tan-yu of late-stage patterns: one no longer nourishes until one has moved things along.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Turmeric	Warm	Bitter, Pungent	Moves Blood and loosens the frozen obstruction	*The daily pinch with black pepper: the painkiller of stasis, the spice the clinical trial raised.*
Eggplant, Aubergine	Cold	Sweet	Moves Blood and clarifies heat	*Roasted or in daube: the stasis vegetable that does not heat.*
Adzuki	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Moves Blood and drains knotted dampness	*The evening azuki soup: the bean that unties what time has knotted.*
Onion	Warm	Sweet, Pungent	Moves Qi and Blood, transforms phlegm	*Melting in every dish: the mild pungency that lifts stasis without heating it.*
Prawn	Warm	Sweet	Moves Blood in the meridians	*Sautéed or in soups: the seafood that warms frozen blood.*
Saffron	Neutral	Bitter	Moves Blood and nourishes at the same time	*The stigmas in broth: the stasis spice that does not wound blood.*
Cinnamon	Hot	Pungent, Sweet	Moves Blood in the cold of the meridians	*The stick in infusion: the fire that makes the blood of cold hands flow.*
Daikon : Chinese Radish	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Transforms phlegm and brings down what stagnates	*Daikon braised in broths: the mild pungency that dissolves knotted phlegm.*
Papaya	Neutral	Sweet	Moves Blood and transforms phlegm	*The morning fruit: the tropical sweetness that unties what time has frozen.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Congealed, cold fats	Variable	Cold-set fat freezes blood in turn: fridge cheeses and too-hard butters keep stasis.
Cured meats and salted foods	Variable	The salt and fat of cured meats knot stasis and phlegm together: the apéritif that tightens the fingers.
Refined sugar	Variable	Sugar thickens the blood that is trying to flow: the midday dessert weighs down the night.
Prolonged sedentary living	Variable	Dietary stasis is not enough if blood does not move: the afternoon chair does more than the dish.

GOLDEN RULE

Move before filling: stasis frozen for years is dislodged by the pungency that circulates gently, and the blood that finally flows nourishes bone.

MODERN NUTRITION

Curcumin: recent meta-analyses (Phytother Res 2024, PMID 38576215; J Ethnopharmacol 2024, PMID 38036015) show an effect on pain comparable to NSAIDs in several trials, provided black pepper and fat are present for bioavailability. Boswellia serrata has its systematic review (BMC Complement Med Ther 2020, PMID 32680575) for stasis flares. Usage precaution: curcumin and saffron in high doses call for caution in patients on anticoagulants.

CROSS-CUTTING ADVICE

Valid whatever the pattern

Osteoarthritis has no cyclical window of action like PMS: the long term writes the plan, and the terrain chooses the strategy. The common base for every pattern: the broth that fills marrow, the weight that unloads the knee, and the sleep that lets Yin remake the blood of the tendons.

- Bone broth in the evening: glycine and proline from cartilage, simmered long, the base of every root pattern
- A handful of oily seeds in the morning: walnuts and black sesame fill the essence age depletes
- Job's tears several times a week: the grain of the ancients for any Bi, whatever the pattern
- Limit sugar and ultra-processed foods: metabolic terrain swells the joint as much as wear does
- Plate heat according to the pattern: warm for cold, neutral for Yin, cool only for the flare
- Sufficient protein every day: stabilising muscles protect the joint as much as cartilage
- Sleep remakes the blood of the tendons: going to bed early is the oldest and most ignored prescription

IN THE KITCHEN

Adapted recipes

The stocks that fill the marrow

Golden Bone Broth, recovery broth with turmeric and beef bones (USA, New York) ●○○ Easy — United States

The most concentrated bone broth: glycine, proline and collagen, the pot-base for Essence deficiency.

Chicken broth with turmeric and red jujubes (China: Guangdong) ●○○ Easy — China

The Cantonese classic that strengthens Qi and Blood: the broth for the tired centre, the jujube that makes blood.

Phở Bò (Vietnamese Beef Soup) — Vietnam

Bone broth simmered for hours, warm spices: the dish that fills marrow and warms meridians.

Pigeon en Salmis — France

The poultry of the ancients: pigeon's blood nourishes the essence of bones running low.

Moules Marinières — France

Concentrated marine Yin in the juice: the essence of the sea for Kidney Yin and bone.

Bœuf Bourguignon — France

The long stew of old bones: the meat of Blood, the sauce that fills the tendons.

The grain of Bi: Job's tears and cereals

Job's Tears Congee with Chicken and Ginger — China

The dish of Bi par excellence: the grain that drives out wind-dampness, the ginger that holds the centre.

Hatomugi-cha (Job's Tears Tea) — Japan

The Japanese infusion of Bi: the same seed as tea, background drainage without fatigue.

Job's Tears Soup with Pumpkin and Coconut Milk — Thailand

Pumpkin strengthens the Spleen while Job's tears drains: the soup for swollen knees.

Job's Tears Porridge with Honey and Cardamom — India

The gentle morning porridge: the grain that loosens cramped tendons, the honey that tempers coolness.

Traditional Scottish Porridge — Scotland

The warm morning oats: the warmth of the bowl that prepares the joint for a cold day.

The sea that nourishes Yin and Blood

Eel with Green Sauce — Belgium

The fish of old bones: Blood and Qi that free the meridians, in the ancients' own words.

Braised Eel with Black Beans — China

The Chinese recipe for Bi: eel counters exhaustion and repels dampness from the meridians.

Grilled Sardines, Tomato and Basil Salad — Portugal/Spain

Whole with their soft bones: calcium, vitamin D and omega-3 in the small fish of the Kidney.

Mussels with Saffron and Fennel — Greece/Mediterranean

The Yin mussels with the saffron that moves Blood: the sea that nourishes without freezing.

Carp with Ginger and Spring Onion China

The freshwater fish that drains dampness: the ginger that disperses the cold of the river.

The fire that disperses cold and dampness

Lamb Tagine with Prunes and Almonds Morocco

The hot meat of Yang: the tagine that warms bone from below, the almonds that fill.

Nasi Kuning, festive yellow rice with coconut milk and turmeric (Indonesia, Java and Bali) ●○○ Easy Indonesia

The golden rice of turmeric: the spice of stasis in the grain that holds the centre.

Lamb Curry with Garlic and Ginger India

Garlic and ginger that disperse cold: the curry for osteoarthritis that takes on dampness.

Ginger and Turmeric Drink India

The infusion of the two spices: the pungency that disperses cold and the bitter that moves blood.

PRACTICAL

Cooking & hygiene tips

1. Simmer long: the bone broths that fill marrow ask for three hours, not thirty minutes
2. The pinch of turmeric always with black pepper: piperine multiplies curcumin bioavailability
3. Job's tears in soup or congee, never cold for deficient terrains: ginger tempers its coolness
4. The morning congee is the daily medicine: rice or millet, two hours of water becoming soup
5. Cook roots gently: yam and pumpkin melt into broth without tiring the Spleen
6. Whole sardines: the soft bones are eaten, that is where calcium and vitamin D live
7. Saffron in warm water, never boiling: fifteen stigmas infused for fifteen minutes
8. Fresh ginger to disperse, dried ginger to warm: the two have their role, not the same pattern
9. Keep the mussels' juice: Kidney Yin lives in the liquid, not only in the shellfish

THROUGH THE YEAR

Seasonal advice

Spring

Spring wind makes pains wander: disperse wind-cold-dampness before Bi takes root, and wash the leaves that move things along

Summer

Heat transforms stagnation into flare: heat patterns express themselves, keep the cool foods that drain, and flares call for medical vigilance

Autumn

Autumn dampness announces cold: drain before winter, Job's tears and barley prepare knees for the season of Bi

Winter

Cold freezes the meridians and Kidney Yang runs low: this is the season of gentle fire, of stews, and of walking that keeps blood moving

NOTES FOR THE PRACTITIONER

- This document is a dietary aide-mémoire for health professionals. It accompanies dietary advice for osteoarthritis; it replaces neither clinical assessment nor medical opinion.
- Red alert: a red, hot, very painful joint, especially with fever or sudden onset, requires same-day medical opinion; gout and septic arthritis are emergencies, not handouts.
- The old corpus speaks directly here: Job's tears (薏苡仁) 'treats cramped tendons that can neither bend nor straighten, the old wind-dampness bi' (Qianjin Yaofang, A04); black sesame (胡麻) 'fills marrow and brain, strengthens tendons and bones' (same source); the Chinese quince (木瓜) 'treats the qi of dampness bi'; and eel 'counters exhaustion, enriches qi and blood, frees meridians, strengthens bones and tendons, repels dampness bi' (Tiaoji Yinshi Bian, A55).
- The rule of double movement: in osteoarthritis, one almost never tonifies deficiency without dispersing what obstructs, and almost never disperses without holding the centre that would weaken. It is the exact opposite of the Stomach Heat sheet: here the corrector is the tonic, not the cool, and the dose is read on the centre's fatigue, not on the tongue coating.
- Phases of the strategy: the flare is calmed by the cool (pattern 3), the root is nourished by the tonic (patterns 4 to 8), stasis is loosened by the circulatory (pattern 9). Most often one mixes: disperse in the morning what obstructs, nourish in the evening what empties.
- The nightshade myth: tomatoes, aubergines and peppers have never been shown to aggravate in serious studies (Nutrients 2025, PMID 40507141), and their polyphenols may even help; the sheet classifies them by nature and flavour, not by legend.
- Medical coordination: advanced osteoarthritis calls for rheumatological follow-up, reference radiography, and sometimes infiltration or prosthesis; the dietary sheet accompanies, does not replace, and anti-inflammatories are monitored on the digestive terrain.

To go further: the "Bi Zheng: the four fundamental types of painful obstruction", "Tong Bi: fixed, intense pain, cold osteoarthritis and Kidney Yang deficiency", "Zhuo Bi: heaviness, numbness, gonarthrosis and joint effusion", "Gu Bi: deep bone degeneration, Liver-Kidney deficiency and Jing foods", "Xue Bi: Blood stasis, fixed night pain and chronic deformities", "Osteoarthritis: cartilage, chondrocytes, degeneration and nutritional protocol", and "Bi syndrome in TCM: Wind-Cold-Dampness, Kidney Yang deficiency and Blood stasis" courses at the Yin Shi Academy (formation.yinshi.app).

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Professional document to hand out or adapt in consultation.