

# Eating for a Balanced (Macrobiotic) Life



14th – 18th July at the Chiang Mai Hall Central Plaza Chiang Mai Airport

**Life is good. However, most of us living in this “civilized” world are creating unnecessary stress in our lives by choosing an unbalanced lifestyle. We are working too hard and not getting enough rest. As a result, our mind, body and spirit are often telling us to take better care. Are we listening?**

Maybe you need to meditate or spend more time with family and friends. You ask yourself, “Where can I find time for this?” Well, there are always 24 hours in a day. We make time for the things that are most important to us.

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Humans everywhere used to live in more traditional ways than nowadays. Meaning, they ate what grew seasonally, naturally and locally – more like other animals, and in-balance with their environment. Some people still do, such as those living in hill tribes or small villages. Of course people got (and still get) sick. However, their locally grown food served as medicine. They ate what their bodies needed at the time – in sickness and in-health.

Khun Pimwalan Pithuprapa, owner of Ruen Come-in Restaurant and Residence in Chiang Mai, says the mass producing of food nowadays is done in-response to a growing world population. It is unnatural, and this is resulting in the state of decreasing, or poor, health for all people.

Regardless, Pimwalan is choosing to take responsibility for her life by carefully choosing and eating locally grown and seasonally available food. As much as possible, she lives in-balance with what her body is telling her to eat – a “macrobiotic” lifestyle.

“If you want to be healthy, you have to think about nature...love the animals...love the people around you too. Don’t destroy. Then you will be organic in your mind and in your body. This, is the heart of macrobiotics.”

Macrobiotics may seem like a word used at the hospital, or the name of a medicine that will help you feel better after eating bad street food. However, broken-down and digested, this word means “macro (large) – bio (life) – tique (method or technique).”

The earliest written use of ‘macrobiotics’ is found in the writings of Hippocrates (460-370BC), who officially founded Western medicine. Hippocrates introduced this word for talking about people who were living a long, healthy life. However, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland – a German, eighteenth century physician – was the first to formally apply macrobiotic theory by talking about how a person’s health always has to do with diet and lifestyle, and people get sick because this is unbalanced.

Then there was Sagen Ishizuka, a Japanese military doctor during the 1800s, who experienced great success with helping sick people by guiding their health with macrobiotic foods – such as brown rice, grains and other fruits and vegetables grown in Japan. Sagan was the first to develop a scientific system related to a macrobiotic lifestyle and share this knowledge with the world outside of Japan.

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Macrobiotics is more about developing a balanced, inner direction toward choosing foods that are good for our body than it is about following a strict diet. And a very important thing to understand about this is how foods affect the energy – yin and yang – of which our bodies (and food) are made. If we can understand this, choosing and eating foods that are truly healthy becomes easier and as natural as we are.

Energy exists in two forms: Yin (moving outward) and yang (moving inward).

Think of the earth and its soil. This is yang energy. The sky is yin energy (air; clouds). Foods growing downward into the earth, such as potatoes and carrots, are yang energy. Foods growing away from the earth (lettuce and tomatoes) are yin energy. Yang foods are solid and heavy, such as eggs and meat. Yin foods are light and water-based (pineapple and lychee).

Yin is winter energy. Therefore, yang-foods that warm our inner body grow during the winter. Yang is summer energy. Therefore, we often want to eat cooling foods – such as fruits and cold, sugary sweets (ice cream) – during this time.

Furthermore, yin is night energy (white); yang is daytime energy (yellow). Women are moon energy (outward; yin). Men are sun energy (inward; yang). Our feelings are energy, and a man generally doesn’t talk about feelings as much as a woman. However, the energy of both a man and woman balance each other. This is why we are attracted.

When balanced, sometimes babies are made. A child is small and compressed (yang energy) and often has coloring (red). When a person dies, he or she lets go of his or her energy. The eyes open and the breathe releases, stops and the body becomes white (yin energy).

It is all connected: Food; life; energy.

“Life is the journey from yang to yin,” said Noriko Yabata, a coordinator for Japan’s booth contribution to this month’s Chiangmai International Food Festival 2011 (CIFF 2011). “In this journey, this balance is always changing. Therefore, in each stage of life, what kind of food we eat (and need) is also different.”

Health (and macrobiotics) is about life, and what we choose to do with ourselves. The key is choosing foods that balance us into a state of perfect health.

“The body is very (difficult to understand),” says Yabata. “We really know nothing about it. Food is most important. Body and soil are one. This means that the land and you are one. It is the same thing.

“Eat local and seasonal. Life is balanced as a whole. Eat as a whole. Ask your stomach what it likes.”

Pimwalan says our body always tells us what foods it needs. Well, what if it wants a McDonald’s cheeseburger? “It’s not local!” she said while laughing.

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The Japanese-style macrobiotic diet is primarily made up of whole grains, especially the cancer-fighting brown rice, vegetables, beans and legumes, miso soup, sea vegetables and naturally processed foods such as salted fish and seafood; seeds and nuts (and their butters). Other natural, organic animal products may be included, especially if the body needs them while you make a change in your eating habits.

Noriko says this diet outside of Japan “isn’t always popular” because many believe it lacks variety. However, this basic, Japanese macrobiotic diet is only an example. There are many food combinations available, and we just need to be creative.

She says a main reason why Thailand is a rich country is because of the many different types of fruits and vegetables that naturally grow here. And Pimwalan is proof that a local-to-Thailand, macrobiotic diet is easy to do and works.

There is lots of rice Thailand, and she eats it year-round – with every meal, whether it is fried or in the form of milk or soup. Pimwalan says that white rice has little or no nutrition because the outer part (husk) containing all of the nutrients has been stripped away. Therefore, she selects brown rice that is whole-grained, not broken, “still has good energy,” and she prepares it using a pressure cooker. This process takes time; however, how much is your health (and life) worth to you?

During the hot season, soybean, tea (sometimes cold), lemonade with honey and a little bit of salt for being “fresh in the daytime when it’s hot” are often on the menu. She will eat soup with onions and lotus root or carrots in the evening, along with mushrooms, seaweed, bamboo chutes, corn and salad (maybe with some cucumber, tomatoes and a dash of salt).

When it’s hot and rainy, Pimwalan cooks up some bamboo chutes, leafy vegetables, dried fish, tomatoes and mango. During the winter months, more steamed vegetables (pumpkin, carrots and beans) it is. This is balanced with sweeter foods such as chili dips and sweet tomatoes. Also, “we must eat, everything.” A small fish: everything. Eat a carrot from its leaves to the tip – the yin to the yang.

“We have to be balanced. When we are balanced, we are healthy, and our minds and bodies will not be sick anymore, for all of life.”

**Lastly, always chew properly – “a time-based art,” as Noriko calls it. And take delight in your food. “To save your life, you take another life. Appreciate it.”**



Enjoy your health. Live, life...

**If you suffer from any of the following health problems, improve your health by trying these menu items. Learn more by participating in a macrobiotic cooking class available at CIFF2011.**

#### \*High blood pressure or other circulatory problems:

Eat foods such as seaweeds that neutralize your blood and make it flow more smoothly, such as seaweeds. They also prevent cholesterol from accumulating in the arteries. Also, Soba (buckwheat) prevents blood vessels from hardening, and bitter-tasting foods strengthen the heart.

##### Try these:

- Wakame and hijiki seaweed salad
- Soba sushi roll
- Assorted vegetable tempura
- Clear soup of Chinese cabbage, kombu, shiitake and umeboshi

#### \*Kidney problems:

The kidneys are the last filters of the digestive system. When they are tired or sick, avoid all artificial chemicals as these additives make them work harder. Also, avoid cold food (e.g. (raw) salad), cold drinks, ice cream, etc. Eating azuki is recommended for clearing the kidneys.

##### Try these:

- Amaranths and walnut mixture
- Mixed vegetable soup with Yanno (azuki bean powder)
- Brown rice porridge with pearl rice
- Grilled tofu and assorted root vegetables

#### \*Cancer

Macrobiotic theory addresses how cancers are the result of too much protein, fat, chemical products and food additives in the diet, which make the blood acidic. Generally, cancer is yin; so combating it with yang foods is recommended.

##### Try these:

- Tekka miso (very yang condiments with root vegetables)
- Brown rice with azuki beans
- Grated daikon radish and burdock miso-soup
- Assorted fried-then-steamed vegetables

#### \*Respiratory diseases

Like cancer, respiratory diseases are very yin energy related, so eating yang foods is recommended. Black soy beans are effective for countering asthma, and lotus root is good for the respiratory system.

##### Try these:

- Carrot and ngei-miso
- Brown rice porridge with black soy beans
- Deep-fried lotus root ball with mushroom sauce
- Dried daikon
- Miso soup with daikon leaves and aonori seaweed

#### \*Allergies

Allergies generally occur from consuming imperfect discharges of animal protein, sugar, daily sanitary products, fat and especially chemicals such as food additives and pesticides.

##### Try these:

- Seaweed jelly
- Sautéed kuruma-fu (traditional dried seitan)
- Brown rice
- Assorted steamed vegetable with sesame sauce
- Shiitake-kombu clear soup with daikon and cauliflower