Spring Cleaning Your Body

Spring is the season traditionally associated with the liver, with cleansing and renewing, with letting go the old and opening up to the new, shedding winter coats and stuffy rooms for T-shirts and the green outdoors.

This is also the best time of year to cleanse the liver, an inner way of letting go of the old. The liver is an incredible organ involved in many of the most important processes of the body. It is the main organ of detoxification, a major part of the immune system, has a strong role in the digestive system, and plays a role in the hormonal system, deactivating circulating hormones. The liver is central to life, and helping it function better helps all our other organs to function better.

In times past, when humans lived more rurally and closer to the land (before central heating and produce trucks from California), spring was a transition from a sedentary time when few vegetables were available to a more active time as farming season began and the first spring greens came in. So spring became a time of preparing the body for a more active life. Though this transition is less intense these days, it is still an appropriate time to work on liver issues.

The three main ways to cleanse and aid the liver are fasting, maintaining a good diet, and using medicinal herbs specific to the liver.

Most people think of fasting as refraining from all intake of food, but there are many kinds of fasts, from liquid fasts using juices, teas and broths to simple food fasts, like eating only fruits or soup or brown rice, for example. What's important is to find a fast that works for you at the level you want to work at. Remember that the most important part of the fast is how you begin and end the fast.

Which brings us to diet. Don't forget your body needs building with appropriate food as well as cleansing. A healthy diet will be different for each individual, but the best kinds of diets follow the ancient diets of our ancestors, since that's what our bodies are tooled for. Organic, unprocessed foods with a good amount of whole grains and a variety of vegetables is key. Preservatives, artificial flavors and artificial colors are to be avoided, as are artificial sweeteners like Aspartame.

Medicinal herbs are the third part of the healing triad. Some of the best gentle cleansing herbs for the liver are some of the most common weeds – Burdock and Dandelion root, both of which work well as tea, tincture or even capsules. Burdock is even available as a vegetable!

For stronger herbs, there's Yarrow, Yellow Dock and Barberry, all available locally, and more bitter tasting and activating. Of course, stronger isn't always better. If you've never worked on your liver before or if your lifestyle is stressful on the detoxification pathways of the body, you may want to start with the more gentle herbs. If you lead a pretty clean lifestyle already and are ready for a deeper cleanse, then go for the stronger herbs.

So take the time this spring to treat your liver right, and get set for better health and longevity. And after you're done cleansing, choose positive ways to build your vitality, so that you can maintain that balance between cleansing and building, both of which are essential to life.

Corey-Pine Shane will be teaching a "Liver Love Intensive" at the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine on Saturday, March 16. He also offers consultations and classes in the Asheville area, and can be contacted at 275-6221 or at coreypine@bigfoot.com.