

# Book Reviews

## Overcome Neck & Back Pain

Kit Laughlin  
Simon & Schuster, 2006 (4th edition)  
ISBN 0-7318-1263-8

This new edition of Kit Laughlin's *Overcome Neck & Back Pain* will be welcomed by both patients who suffer from musculoskeletal pain and practitioners who treat such patients. In this fourteen-chapter book, 44 stretching exercises and five strengthening exercises are described in detail and illustrated with photos. These exercises are designed to treat pain in the neck, shoulder, arm, middle back, lower back, hip and the lower extremities.

The book takes a self-help approach and, as a result, the language used is simple, and instructions are easy to follow. Anatomical diagrams are included to explain why one might experience pain. For instance, to explain why shortened piriformis can cause the symptoms of sciatica, four diagrams are presented to illustrate the individual variations of how the sciatic nerve passes through the piriformis.

The updated fourth edition is an improvement on the 1998 edition. Firstly, better photos are used for clarity. Secondly, there is a new chapter explaining the general principles of 'stretching'. Finally, a chapter that explains exercises for pain in the shoulder, arm and hand is added. Overall, it is a better printed and illustrated book.

The author is an athlete and shiatsu practitioner and has taught stretching classes in Australia for more than 15 years. Having himself experienced many injuries, lower back pain and pelvic obliquity, then subsequently restored to normality after shiatsu and stretching

exercises, Kit has thought deeply about the Eastern and Western approaches to health and treatment. He has finally come up with a hybrid method in which he utilises the knowledge of anatomy and physiology, Eastern techniques and philosophical approaches (i.e. to simplify the causes and to pursue desired outcomes).

In the introduction, Kit explains what led him to his approach and reports on a few clinical cases. Chapter 1, 'Self-Diagnosis', gives a brief anatomical introduction on the location of major muscles. The author then focuses on explaining how to test pelvic obliquity and illustrates the impact of this obliquity on other parts of the body.

Chapter 2, 'Stretching', explains what constrains our stretches and types of stretches (static and ballistic stretching), then introduces the author's unique method of 'Posture and Flexibility' that incorporates static stretching and contraction-relaxation techniques with breathing and partner-assisted approaches. This chapter lays the groundwork for the general principles of stretching. Here we can see the blend of Western and Eastern methods. Breathing techniques and body awareness are the two essential elements in many Asian exercises, such as Yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Gong. It is appealing to any oriental medicine practitioners to see the use of these two elements in stretching.

Chapters 3–8 detail stretching exercises. Chapters 9 and 10 explain strengthening exercises and relaxation techniques, respectively. Finally, Chapter 11 explains

the multiple causes involved in acute and chronic pain.

My criticism of the book is the mechanistic approach to musculoskeletal pain. The author emphasises the impact of tightened muscles and pelvic obliquity on the cause of pain. This understanding is limited. Pain is multi-dimensional and factors such as mental stress and coping strategies are not discussed or mentioned. Furthermore, self-diagnosis can be dangerous when undertaken by a lay audience. Patients who read the book and attend the author's classes might have a better understanding of their problem and could come up with a suitable diagnosis. For many readers, merely reading the book would not help them make a correct diagnosis. It was reassuring to read the author's recommendation that patients discuss their exercises with their practitioners.

Results of two systematic reviews indicate that combined exercise and physical therapy are more effective than either modality alone for neck pain and for ankylosing spondylitis. Effective types and amount of exercise are yet to be studied.

As clinicians who treat musculoskeletal pain patients, we are familiar with incorporating stretching and strengthening exercises in acupuncture, massage and/or herbal medicine to enhance and maintain the effect of treatments. This book provides a systematic and orientally flavoured approach. I highly recommend the book as an exercise manual in the clinic.

Zhen Zheng

## Food for the Seasons: Eat Well and Stay Healthy the Traditional Chinese Way

Lun Wong and Kath Knapsy  
Red Dog, 2006  
ISBN 1-921167-32-7

Bright, informative and well turned out! That is how I described 85-year-old Professor Lun Wong to a friend after I watched him deliver an energetic workshop about Chinese physical arts in Melbourne at AACMAC 2005. A couple of years later, it came as no surprise that the second edition of Lun Wong's book, *Food for the Seasons: Eat Well and Stay Healthy the Traditional Chinese Way*, co-authored by Kath Knapsy, had me mouthing a similar turn of praise even before I realised who Lun Wong was. Back in 2005, a bit of detective work soon revealed that he has a long history of involvement in traditional Chinese arts. Born in 1919, Lun Wong moved to Hong Kong in 1949 and founded the local branch of a traditional Chinese martial art called Wu De Hui. Considered a grand master of this art, he relocated to Melbourne in 1974 and went on to found the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine Australia in the same year, where he started teaching Wu Da Liao Fa, or the Five Integrated Methods of TCM.

When first published in 2002, *Food for the Seasons* was Lun Wong's first book written in English. This revised edition is published in Melbourne by a small company called Red Dog. Nevertheless, *Food for the Seasons* exhibits none of the quirky, if not annoying, qualities often found lurking on pages of books when foreign-language authors publish outside the mainstream. Good editing allows Lun Wong's quintessentially Chinese view to mesh seamlessly with contemporary

Australian culture. Whilst, like any other good cook book, it is practical, it also demystifies, what is for many, a confusing and complex concept.

The book is divided into eight well-presented chapters. The first chapter introduces the reader to the basic TCM principles of health, including Yin/Yang theory, the four treasures (Essence, Qi, Shen and Blood), the four pillars (exercise, diet, rest and relaxation), the importance of good digestion and the interconnectedness of the organs and their systems. Chapter two discusses the various energies of food. Here concepts such as the five flavours and the five environmental influences are introduced in a way that allows the reader to quickly grasp the importance of eating in accordance with the seasons. Chapter three is concise and practical, explaining how the tongue is like a personal health chart that can be examined daily to guide choices about what best to eat. By the end of these chapters, it is clear what separates this book from others on the subject. Scattered throughout the text and highlighted in bold print on side panels are numerous theoretical tid-bits. Attributed to Lun Wong or drawn from a rich traditional broth of knowledge, these little gems fuse with the main ingredients of the text to allow the pure and simple elegance of TCM dietetics to rise up, so to say, from the chaff of popular diet fads readers are frequently fed these days. Sixty years of distilled experience bounce out at the reader from almost every page. That said, chapters four through seven are

where the fun in this book really begins. Packed full of interesting, easy-to-follow recipes, made to TCM dietetic principles from ingredients that are readily available in Australia, these chapters offer a truly contemporary mix. There is chilli con carne to build Yin and clear heat from the lungs and digestive system. There are vegetarian shish kebabs to strengthen the weak or deficient and French-style green peas to remove damp and heat, while helping with high blood pressure. Of course, there are the more traditional East Asian dishes, such as steamed fish with ginger for vertigo and dizziness and sweet corn soup with crabmeat to open the lungs and settle the heart. Readers will even find liqueurs for indigestion, tonics for tendons and deserts that nurture kidney Yin or remove excess damp. Chapter eight concludes the book and includes a list of all the ingredients used throughout the text, along with a snap-shot of their energetic and general uses for the maintenance of health.

The only gripe I would have, if I had to have one, is this: in an environment where we are constantly blasted by superslick images in cookbooks by naked chefs, *Food for the Seasons* seems to suffer a little from its lack of glossy photos. At \$29.95 it is an inexpensive purchase for professionals and lay people alike, but for my money, I prefer to see what I'm cooking. That said, *Food for the Seasons* is packed full of goodies, both theoretical and gastronomic. I liked it – I think my patients will too!

*Paul McLeod*