

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Lotus lore

The lotus flower has a delicate fragrance and a simple beauty that's made it the subject of poets for centuries. The plant is also important in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Every part can be used – the seeds are highly valued and served in Chinese desserts such as moon cakes in the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Lotus seeds (right) are harvested at the end of autumn or in early winter. After being peeled and removed, the bitter cores of

the seeds are dried in the sun. In TCM, lotus seeds are considered sweet and astringent, and are associated with the spleen, kidney and heart meridians.

They're used to tonify the spleen, reinforce the kidneys and nourish the heart. The bitter core can be used for feverish conditions. For those with heart palpitations and insomnia, lotus seeds are often used with poria, sour jujube seed and Chinese arborvitae kernel to tranquillise the spirit housed in the heart, according to TCM belief.

The astringent properties of lotus seeds can help to relieve diarrhoea, heavy menstruation or vaginal discharges. When combined with atractylodes root, poria or yams, lotus seeds are

said to treat chronic diarrhoea by tonifying the spleen and calming bowel movements.

With heavy menstruation or vaginal discharge, which TCM says is due to unconsolidated kidney *chi*, lotus seeds are used to boost the astringent power of the kidneys. It's usually prescribed with dodder seeds, euryale seeds, oyster shell or yams.



In autumn and winter, lotus seed is an ingredient that helps protect against the dry atmosphere. Try this dessert: prepared lotus seeds (30g), dried lily bulbs (10g), red beans (300g), white fungus (5g) and dried tangerine peel (3g). Wash the ingredients and soak in warm water for 40 minutes.

Bring to the boil 1.5 litres of water, add the ingredients and cook for about five minutes. Simmer on low heat for about one hour until ingredients are tender.

Serve warm, adding rock sugar to taste. The dessert is said to be good for the skin, heart and lungs.

*Before taking any medicine, please consult your TCM or medical practitioner*