

HEALTH

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TCM

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Snack happy

In the days before canned food, surplus crops and seasonal fruits were dried or preserved to make them available year round. Fruits such as plums, kumquats, olives and ginger were dried and pickled with a variety of spices and preservatives, and eaten as inexpensive snacks.

Frosted or treated with syrup, liquorice or salt, these snacks were considered important diet supplements. For example, salty snacks replenished salt lost through perspiration, and also helped to retain water and prevent muscle cramps.

Traditional snacks are still popular because they're often low in calories and fat. Although these snacks may not be a healthy choice for everyone – especially those with high blood

pressure or diabetes – they can benefit those with mild ailments.

Ginger can be seasoned with lemon juice, vinegar or tangerine peel. It's commonly used in traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions and Chinese dishes. Its pungent and warm properties are said to promote perspiration, disperse cold and damp, boost blood circulation, soothe the stomach, refresh the spirit and detoxify the body. Ginger is prescribed for motion sickness, morning sickness, nausea, colic, dyspepsia, flatulence and a poor appetite.

Tangerine peel is usually mixed with liquorice and anise, and has a blend of sweet,

pungent, bitter and salty tastes. It's said to relieve indigestion, gas, bloating, nausea, vomiting, and loose stools. It's also seen as a remedy for pain. A small amount of tangerine peel in fish dishes or soups can also help bring out the flavour.

Preserved plums are sweet, sour or salty. They're said to clear liver heat, promote body fluid production, and induce urination. They're suitable if someone is sweaty, has no appetite, has a dry throat or is thirsty. A black preserved plum is usually given along with herbal prescriptions in TCM shops. It can ease stomach upset and take away the bitter decoction taste.

Chinese preserved olives can be sweet or salty. They're usually spiced with liquorice powder. TCM uses olives for sore throats, bad breath, mouth sores and excessive thirst.

The Chinese characters for kumquats mean good luck and fortune. They're suitable for a cough with phlegm, hangovers, dyspepsia, food retention, abdominal discomfort and colic.