

HEALTH

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TCM: Caterpillar cure-all

Cordyceps sinensis is a fungus that lives in caterpillars as a parasite, specifically in the larvae of the hepialid moth (bat moth). The larvae feed on the roots of trees and shrubs above 3,500 metres on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau.

In China, it's called *dong chong xia cao* (winter worm summer-grass). When the fungus invades a larva, its mycelia, which is a mass of threadlike hyphae, fills the body of the host and kills it. The entire fungus-larva combination is collected for medical use. In traditional Chinese medicine, cordyceps is used for disorders of the kidney and lung systems, such as sexual dysfunction, cough, weakened lumbar spine and knees, dizziness and ear ringing.

It helps to promote anti-ageing and recovery from major illness. Chinese housewives like to put a few strips in chicken or duck soups as a remedy for chronic problems.

Cordyceps is a versatile herb that enters the lung and the kidney meridian

to exert a relatively mild tonic effect. It's been used for centuries to regulate and support the gonad weakness evident in kidney deficiencies and to treat chronic coughs with sputum that are manifested in lung disorders.

It is one of the most popular longevity-promoting herbs because it strengthens the adrenal glands and

increases sexual vitality. It's also recommended as a tonic herb for different illnesses because it's able to improve energy, appetite, stamina, endurance and sleeping patterns. And it's helpful in controlling asthma and diabetes. However, people who catch a cold should avoid taking cordyceps.

Authentication of products

containing cordyceps is extremely important.

It's difficult to collect cordyceps. It must be harvested in the rain during the monsoon season. The shortage and rising price of wild cordyceps has led to unscrupulous manufacturers and distributors offering fake products.

Wild cordyceps is divided into different grades. Recently, the price of cordyceps has risen - 30g of the best grade fetches up to HK\$8,000 and the regular grade HK\$3,000. Its quality is generally defined by the origin of growth and the size of each piece.

Cordyceps from Tibet, due to its high elevation and minimal pollution, is considered the best, followed by species from Qinghai and Sichuan.

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Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner