

## TCM: Cool seeds

*Semen coicis* is the dried seed of the yellow-brown-shelled coix lacryma-jobi, which is harvested every autumn in Fujian, Hebei and Liaoning provinces. Used as a herb or as food, the seed tastes sweet and is slightly cool in nature, properties that help strengthen the spleen and resolve imbalances, including dampness and other water-element difficulties. It eliminates dampness from the muscles to relieve pain and is good for tightness and spasms of the tendons restricting flexibility. It also treats lung abscesses characterised by purulent, thick sputum containing pus and blood, and a cough with nasal discharge.

The coix seed also helps to nourish and soften skin, so that it looks smooth and healthy. Skincare lotions that contain natural coix seed extract are known for their ability to cleanse the skin of impurities while imparting moisturising properties.

Agricultural scientists are also investigating the genetics of coix in order to grow it as a food crop, and medical researchers are looking at its healing properties. Coix seeds carry minerals and vitamins such as selenium and vitamin E. These can protect the body from the damaging effects of free radicals and, hence, reduce the occurrence of degenerative disorders.

Modern science has demonstrated the effect of coix seeds on the immune system. They contain a component called coixenolide, which can increase

peripheral cytotoxic lymphocytes and may be effective in combating viral infections.

Another study showed the coix seed has free fatty acids that process anti-cancer activity when tested on a mouse tumour, but it's too early to tell whether these laboratory findings will carry over into humans.

Regular doses of between 10g and 30g can be taken as a decoction, or as pills and powder, or in food such as congee.

Unprocessed *Semen coicis* functions better to clear heat and regulate water circulation, whereas dry-fried it tonifies the spleen and relieves diarrhoea.

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