

HEALTH

Edited by Suzanne Harrison suzanne.harrison@scmp.com

TCM

Rose Tse and
Angela Collingwood
info@shen-nong.com

Sweet talk

A Chinese folktale recounts how a herbalist left home one day to make the rounds of his district – a journey that often took weeks. Meanwhile, patients kept calling at his home wanting medicine. So, his wife came up with a way to treat them.

Since she knew little about herbs, she tasted her husband's stock: sour herbs, bitter herbs, salty herbs, pungent herbs and sweet herbs. She figured that most people would prefer sweet-tasting herbs, so she chose one to give to anyone who called.

The sweet herb produced good results. So much so that business improved significantly.

When her husband finally returned, he investigated the herb more fully and found that it was most effective in treating conditions involving

low energy, coughs, pains and fatigue. He called the herb *gancao* (sweet herb).

Liquorice – the common name – is now a significant herb in traditional Chinese medicine. It's said to enrich *chi*, invigorate the stomach and spleen, moisten the lungs, clear phlegm, heat and toxins, relieve spasms and alleviate pain. It's also used for heart palpitations, spontaneous sweating, fatigue, poor appetite and loose stools.



In the confectionery industry, water extracts of liquorice are mixed with sugar, corn syrup and flour to make liquorice sweets. It's also used as a sweetening or flavouring agent to counteract the unpleasant taste of herbal blends or added as filler in capsules to conceal the bitterness of other herbs.

Liquorice (left) has been used as a flavouring for centuries, yet many people don't know that it has beneficial medicinal qualities.

Increasingly, researchers such as the US National Cancer Institute have begun investigating its diverse healing properties, from its potential anti-inflammatory abilities to its capacity to soothe stomach upset and control coughing.

Liquorice contains the likes of vitamin E, B-complex, biotin, niacin, pantothenic acid, lecithin, manganese and other trace elements.

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