

HEALTH

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TCM

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Root out the pain

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that grows on hardwood trees such as oak and apple.

There are two kinds of mistletoe. The one commonly used for Christmas decorations is originally from the US and the other is of European origin.

The liquid extract of European mistletoe has been used as an alternative cancer treatment there. Some believe that certain substances in the mistletoe extract may help boost

the immune system and slow down cancer growth. However, the Mayo Clinic says studies have had conflicting results.

This extract is also a prescribed drug in Europe that's administered by injection, but it hasn't been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

The mistletoe used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a different variety. Chinese mistletoe, or *sang ji sheng*, is a mulberry parasitic herb said to be capable of tonifying the liver and kidney, strengthening tendons and bones as well as dispelling wind-dampness in the body.

It's considered essential in treating elderly yin-deficiency patients with chronic lower back pain and sore or weak knees.

According to TCM theory, the liver governs the tendons, and the kidneys govern the bones. Yin deficiency in these two organs will cause accumulation of wind-dampness and lead to stiff and weak tendons, and joint pain.

A legend tells how the son of a wealthy man had been bedridden with rheumatism.

A servant was sent to buy herbs, but the son was still ill, even after being treated with 100 bags of medicine. Finally, the servant picked a plant growing

on a white mulberry tree, which resembled the one the herbalist had given him. After two months of treatment with this plant, the son recovered.

The father asked for the name of the herb and his servant told him that it was "mulberry parasite".

Mistletoe is also used for a restless foetus, which is associated with yin and blood deficiencies. Pregnant women are advised to take mistletoe tea to calm the foetus. The brew's prepared by boiling 15g of mistletoe with four bowls of water for 30 minutes and adding crystal sugar.

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