

HEALTH

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TCM: Berry good

The wolfberry (*goji*) is believed to be one of the most nutritious medicinal herbs and one of the longest recorded health foods in China. The name wolfberry comes from an ancient legend of wolves feasting on ripe berries and leaves. It is a red-orange berry derived from two closely related species, *Lycium barbarum* and *Lycium chinense*, of the Solanacea family, which includes potatoes, tomatoes and eggplant.

Wolfberries are usually sold in dried form. They have been used since ancient times in traditional Chinese medicine for lung, liver and kidney deficiencies as they enter their meridians for promotion. It is the herb of choice for treating blurry vision and other visual disorders such as cataracts, retinopathy, or age-related macular degeneration; dizziness, soreness and weakness of the lower back and knees caused by liver and kidney yin deficiencies; and chronic dry coughs caused by lung yin deficiencies.

Chinese medicine claims that the fruit promotes organ functions, improves vision and replenishes body essence. It is particularly suitable for long-term use and general invigoration. Traditionally, Chinese wolfberry was regarded as a supreme tonic and a beauty and anti-ageing agent. It is widely used in various diets, wines, enriching soft extracts or patent remedies that are made for these purposes.

Pharmacological studies reveal that wolfberries contain a lot of nutrients such as vitamin C, B1 and B2, polysaccharides, beta-sitosterol, linoleic acid, beta-carotene, zeaxanthin, nicotinic acid and betaine. The polysaccharides in wolfberries not only enhance immune health and anti-oxidation, they are also a major source of soluble dietary fibre that may lower blood cholesterol, promote colon health and stabilise blood glucose levels after meals. In addition, beta-sitosterol can

reduce cholesterol levels by preventing cholesterol absorption in the gut. It is also rich in beta-carotene and zeaxanthin, which are essential nutrients for the eyes.

Researchers from Hong Kong Polytechnic University have demonstrated that the zeaxanthin (an ingredient for promoting vision) in wolfberry is easily absorbed and that a

daily intake of wolfberries helps maintain macular pigment density of the eyes' retina, and hence promotes vision.

Everyone can take wolfberries on a daily basis for general health. It can be taken raw, consumed as a juice or wine, prepared as a tincture or decocted into an herbal tea. For decoction, 6 to 15 grams of wolfberries are used in combination with other herbs like chrysanthemum and yams.

The wolfberry leaf is sometimes used instead of the fruit. A popular Chinese-style soup is made with the leaf and pork liver. This soup is reputed to sharpen eyesight. Apart from the wolfberry's fruit and leaves, its seeds, roots and bark have also been used by the Chinese for centuries in many herbal formulas.

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Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings (www.icm.com.hk). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner