

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Sweet stuff

Solomon's seal rhizome, also known as *huang jing*, or yellow essence, is a sweet herb that nourishes kidneys, moistens lungs, and reinforces *chi* (vital energy).

It's used to treat dry coughs caused by yin deficiency or yin-deficient heat. It's believed to promote the generation of bone marrow, and is also said to help relieve symptoms of spleen weakness, such as fatigue, poor appetite and weak pulse.

It's widely grown in humid, low-level areas of China, except in the tropical south, and – according to its cultivation origins – there are five different species.

A perennial herb with a fleshy root, its value as a traditional Chinese medicine began about 2,000 years ago with Hua Tuo, a famous

physician. Hua is said to have seen two strong young men chasing after a young girl while he was picking herbs on a mountain. The men couldn't catch up with the girl because she was running so fast.

He was surprised that a girl could outrun the men and decided to find out what she ate to make her so energetic and active.

He prepared some food and put it in a cave, then hid inside to wait for the girl. She finally appeared and grabbed the food. Hua then blocked the entrance to keep her from escaping. After some questioning, the girl told him she'd been eating the big fleshy roots of a plant.

After letting her go, Hua found the plant and dug out the fleshy roots.

He named it yellow essence because of its colour and because he thought it was as pure as essence.

According to modern pharmacological studies, yellow essence has a variety of pharmaceutical actions, such as enhancing immunity, reducing blood glucose and

fat levels and prolonging life. In clinical applications, it has been noted for enhancing the body's immune function, safeguarding liver cells, reducing hypercholesterolemia, decreasing blood sugar and dilating the coronary artery. The hypoglycemic effect of its methanol extract has also been studied by researchers in Kobe, Japan, in 1993.

The results, published in the journal *Biological and Pharmaceutical Bulletin*, showed that the extract can significantly reduce the blood glucose level in rats with type-one diabetes.

Also in 1993, a Beijing study was conducted of 386 traditional anti-ageing herbs, including yellow essence, to determine their effect on cell growth and survival, metabolic functions and anti-infection properties.

This found that yellow essence was effective as an anti-ageing agent.

Because it may affect blood glucose levels, this herb is best prescribed by a TCM practitioner.

Because it's sticky and greasy, it's usually cooked in water or soaked in alcohol or vinegar before being made into a decoction.

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