

## HEALTH

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## TCM: reed rhizome

Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine say the reed rhizome has a sweet flavour and is cold in property, which is associated with the lung and stomach meridians.

It helps to clear heat and promote the production of body fluids. It is most useful in clearing heat pathogens and fluid damage characterised by fever, thirst and irritability.

Because of the relative mildness of its therapeutic actions, reed rhizome rarely works as the major ingredient, but rather as an associate ingredient to improve and treat accompanying symptoms or disharmony that exists alongside.

The plants are usually dug up throughout the year for TCM medicine. After removing their fibrous roots and skin, they will be dried under sunlight before use. Phragmite is the name given to several types of grass-like aquatic plants including the common reed, giant reed and reed-canary grass.

They can be found on river banks in the temperate and tropical parts of the world. Most reeds need neutral or alkaline water to grow. They do not usually occur in acidic aquatic regions. They can be frequently found at the upper edges of estuaries or other wetlands such as grazing marshes.

TCM believes that when the stomach is afflicted by heat, it usually causes thirst. Sometimes the normal circulation of stomach *chi* can also be affected by such heat, resulting in nausea and vomiting.

Reed rhizomes are good for relieving these conditions, and are generally combined with herbs like bamboo shavings and loquat leaf.

Thirst accompanied by hot flashes can be treated with reed rhizome, dwarf lily-turf tuber and snake gourd root. Similarly, thirst, dry mouth, cough and yellow sticky sputum – the symptoms of lung heat problems – can

be treated with herbal formulas made up of reed rhizome. For example, it can arrest coughs when used with snake gourd peel, anemarrhena rhizome and thunberg fritillary bulb. It also promotes pus drainage in lung abscess when combined with winter gourd seed, coix seed and peach kernel.

Reed rhizome can act as a diuretic to promote the production of urine. In the treatment of mild food poisoning caused by fish, crab or alcohol, it may be used in combination with other herbs.

Some bleeding problems are also due to the overheating of the blood. Drinking reed rhizome tea regularly is recommended for bleeding gums.

Reed rhizomes contain chemicals such as vitamins A, B1, B2 and C, and several triterpenes (a biochemical substance that transforms into steroids).

The normal daily dose of dried reed rhizomes should be between 15 and 30 grams. Fresh reed rhizomes are believed to be stronger in clearing heat and promoting fluid production than the processed variety.

Due to its cold nature, reed rhizome should be used with caution by those suffering from a spleen or stomach deficiency.

It is classified as a heat-clearing herb which may reduce blood pressure. Thus concurrent use of herbs and drugs that affect blood pressure should be prescribed carefully and monitored to avoid potential fluctuations in blood pressure.

There have been no reported risks associated with the oral administration of reed rhizomes.

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