

HEALTH

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TCM

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Raw and sore

During autumn, the weather changes to cool and dry, and many people get an uncomfortable, dry feeling in their throat, which may become sore.

One way people combat this is by sucking lozenges. There are many different types on the market. Some people even use them to try to prevent sore throats.

But although many people regard lozenges as a sort of healthy candy, are they good for you?

Both western and traditional Chinese medicine lozenges are for specific indications (although TCM doesn't recommend sweet lozenges), and more attention should be paid to their proper uses.

A western medicine-based lozenge generally contains local anaesthetic – to reduce the sensation of nerves in the throat – and demulcents, which coat the oesophagus. They've proved to be effective.

In 2002, clinical studies in Britain and Germany on new lozenge formulas showed that they can reduce throat soreness and difficulty in swallowing, and can relieve pain.

Several brands of lozenge have herbal formulas that are designed to keep the throat moist and humid by stimulating secretion of the mucous membranes.

These sorts of lozenges may not be suitable for a virally infected sore throat because such infections tend to stimulate excess mucus secretions, resulting in symptoms such as a runny nose and cough. Using herbal lozenges in such a case

may exacerbate the symptoms. Seasonal transition periods – when lozenges are more likely to be used – are normally times when TCM evils (climatic forces largely responsible for infectious illnesses) are likely to attack.

In TCM, the sweetness of a lozenge can cause phlegm. If there's too much phlegm, outside evils can accumulate on it. The outcome is that people who use lozenges during a seasonal transition are more predisposed to infections and respiratory illnesses.

TCM practitioners don't recommend sweet food or drink during this season for the same reasons.

Lozenges made with Chinese white olive can be used instead to soothe throat dryness and discomfort, with TCM practitioners recommending that people chew two to three to reduce discomfort.

It mightn't taste of honey and menthol, but it's a sugar-free way to soothe your throat.