

Ginseng for patients

In the third of a four-part series, **Joan Chew** finds out how Korean ginseng can be consumed by those with medical conditions

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the appropriate use of ginseng depends on its inherent properties as well as each person's constitution and environment.

Korean ginseng, known as gaolishen in Chinese, is regarded as a warm herb that is used to address qi (vital energy) and yang (the element linked to heat) deficiencies.

Signs of a qi deficiency include fatigue, loose stools, loss of appetite, dizziness and paleness. A yang deficiency is marked by symptoms such as chills, limbs that feel cold, frequent urination, erectile dysfunction in men and irregular menstruation in women.

While ginseng is usually consumed for general well-being, Ms Karen Wee, a TCM practitioner at Renhai Clinic in Neil Road, said people with medical conditions can also benefit from taking Korean ginseng, as long as they are assessed by their TCM physicians to suffer from a lack of qi or yang.

But she advised these patients to start by taking the potent herb in small dosages of under 5g a day.

This is because some people have a "heaty" constitution that would not do well with warm herbs. Those with hypertension, for instance, tend to have excess yang in their bodies.

Another group that will benefit from ginseng is diabetics. Ms Wee said common complaints of diabetics, such as dry mouth and excessive thirst, are hallmarks of a yin (the element responsible for cooling organs) deficiency, which may progress to a yang deficiency.

As for patients with kidney disease, who are thought to be deficient in qi, yin and yang, the use of Korean ginseng depends on the severity of their deficiencies.

Mr Feng Jiayang, a TCM practitioner at Sinchong Meheco, said ginseng should be used mainly by people aged 50 and above, as they are more likely to develop qi and yang deficiencies. He said children should not consume Korean ginseng because their active natures show they have plenty of yang.

Dr Reginald Liew, a senior consultant cardiologist at The Harley Street Clinic at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital and Gleneagles Hospital, said studies have reported conflicting results of ginseng on blood pressure.

Dr Liew said: "In view of these varied responses and unpredictability of effects, I would caution against the use of ginseng solely to treat high blood pressure."



PHOTO: RENHAI CLINIC

He has "no objection to people taking ginseng in small doses for general health", but would advise patients with known hypertension, heart conditions or arrhythmia against taking ginseng. For those who still wish to take the herb, he advised them not to consume it with Western medication and to inform their doctors.

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RECIPE

Korean ginseng fish with mushrooms

(Serves four)

INGREDIENTS

2 pcs chicken breast
1 Korean ginseng, sliced
10g wolfberries, washed
20g small black fungus, soaked in water
150g bunashimeiji mushrooms, washed
200g enoki mushrooms, washed
300g sea bass, sliced
½ tsp salt
Chinese parsley, as desired

METHOD

Boil the chicken breast in water for 30 minutes. Keep the broth and discard the chicken.

In the same pot, add the Korean ginseng and boil for another 30 minutes over low heat. Then, add the wolfberries and salt.

Add the black fungus and bunashimeiji mushrooms, cover the pot and cook for two minutes.

Finally, add the enoki mushrooms and sea bass. Cover the pot and simmer till the fish is thoroughly cooked.

Garnish the dish with Chinese parsley and serve warm.

Source: Ms Karen Wee, traditional Chinese medicine practitioner at Renhai Clinic