

The Clinical Use of Mushrooms from a Traditional Chinese Medical Perspective

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Mushrooms have been used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for many centuries over the past two millennia. They have been used in both nutritional and herbal medicine applications. In

example, Chinese people have long believed that mushrooms not only taste good but also have a detoxification effect (except for the toxic species), cleaning and cleansing the body as well as healing wounds. From the nutritional point of view, the Chinese believe that mushrooms are essential in cleansing the liver and kidneys and are often included in the main daily meal. Mushrooms have long been regarded as a great delicacy, on the dinner table of both the Chinese aristocracy and the common people.

The Chinese recognize six basic types of medicinal mushrooms, according to color—namely, white, red, purple, black, blue, and green. These colors fit into the TCM system of natural correspondences, which resonate with various diseases. For example, red is for the heart, black is for the kidneys, and green is for the liver and gallbladder.

Medicinally, the Chinese have been using mushrooms perennially for the purposes of well-being and longevity. One of the most famous examples is *Ganoderma lucidum* (W.Curt.:Fr.)Lloyd (Ling Zhi or Reishi), a reddish tree fungus, which is reputed to be an elixir. This fungus has been shown through intensive scientific research to contain many polysaccharides and secondary metabolites, which appear to have an anticancer and immuno-enhancing effect, and also have a positive effect with respect to treating autoimmunity, anti-inflammation, and various neurohumoral disorders.

Another mushroom *Trametes versicolor* (L.:

daily life, the use of mushrooms may be thought of in terms of “folk medicine,” and the Chinese have included many mushroom species in their daily cooking and also for healing purposes. For

Fr.)Pilát (= *Coriolus versicolor*), known as Yun Zhi, a greyish tree fungus (which has a distinctive cloud-like shape), has been used effectively over the centuries for anticancer purposes as well as for lowering cholesterol and enhancing longevity. *Cordyceps* spp., a yellowish green tree fungi, were proven valuable in harmonizing the immune system and the overall general physiology of the body.

In general, mushrooms are vitally important in treating various disorders encountered in daily clinical practice, such as respiratory disease, diabetes, and liver problems. In ancient times, decoctions were the usual method of administration. In modern TCM, mushrooms are offered as a medicine in capsules, powders, and teas and in various nutritional items such as soups and stews. They are often combined with other herbal medicines to enhance the general curative effect. Like most Chinese nutritive and herbal remedies, they work relatively slowly from the inside out, from the deep to the superficial Qi (vital energy) levels—from the internal organ systems to the meridians. The secret of the use of mushrooms in TCM is to potentiate, to complement, and to activate the effects of other TCM therapies in integration with biomedicine.

In my own medical clinic, I have found one of the most useful TCM prescriptions to be Six Treasures of Ling Zhi Mushrooms with bee pollen together with various pearls and herbs. It is in the form of a capsule, enhancing the energy/immunity of all patients as well as beneficial for cancer patients.