

TCM: poor man's ginseng

Pilose asiabell root refers to the fresh or dried root of the plant *codonopsis pilosulae*. It's a small perennial native to the mainland, and is abundant in Shanxi province. Its Chinese name, *dang shen*, is derived partly from its major source of origin, Shangdang (dang), and is similar in appearance to ginseng (shen).

For a long time, the herb was regarded as a variety of ginseng. It wasn't until the 16th century that a herbalist named Li Shizhen found the original species of panax ginseng was no longer available, so people were using *codonopsis pilosulae*.

Since then it has become an authorised herb in TCM.

Pilose asiabell root is classified as a *chi*-tonifying herb in TCM. It is also known as "poor man's ginseng" as it is often used as a cheaper and secondary substitute for ginseng.

The root has similar but weaker properties to ginseng, so it is indicated for milder cases of *chi* deficiency characterised by shortness of breath, general weakness, fatigue and sweating.

It tonifies the lung and the spleen systems by enhancing their transportation and transformation functions.

Spleen weakness leads to fatigue, low appetite and loose bowels, and these symptoms can be relieved by pilose asiabell root together with largehead *atractylodes* rhizome, poria and liquorice root.

Lung weakness leads to shortness of breath, a weak voice and coughing, so the root is combined with astragalus, schisandra and tatarian aster root.

Pilose asiabell root also strengthens overall metabolism and promotes blood production. Like ginseng, it is an adaptogen that can enhance and

regulate the body's ability to adapt to stress, and is a common ingredient in anti-ageing remedies.

Studies on the mainland have shown its benefits in regulating the bowels, preventing peptic ulcers, and enhancing immunity and mental function.

Pilose asiabell root is often used in Chinese medicinal food recipes. Chicken soup can be prepared with pilose asiabell root (15 grams), astragalus (15 grams) and lotus seed (30 grams) as a *chi* tonic.

No undesirable side effects are reported in clinical applications. However, it should be used with caution when fever is present.

Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings (icm.com.hk). Before taking any medicine, consult your medical or TCM practitioner.