

## *Ancient Medicines, Gifts From The Tree of Life Meet Modern Science*

For thousands of years, the great Asian nations, China, Japan, and Korea, have used herbs, plants and other natural substances to treat the sick and improve and protect the vitality of the healthy. Among the more powerful of these natural substances are the Tree Mushrooms. Many of us have seen all the different types of mushrooms used for cooking, or the toadstool in Alice In Wonderland, but tree mushrooms are different. These are rippled, fan-like fungi that grow on the roots and trunks of trees often times creating the effect of an endless stairway leading to the forest canopy. Certain species of these particular mushrooms have been shown to have truly incredible health benefits that, through this article, you will come to be educated about.

The unique properties of these mushrooms are believed to stem from their main active component, *polysaccharides*, giant complex carbohydrate molecules that stimulate the immune system into action because they resemble the types of molecules found on the surface of pathogenic bacteria, yeast, and viruses. This is the reason why they are so effective when used for immune system disorders, especially in combination with other types of mushrooms with varying molecular structures. The additional benefit to this method of immune stimulation is that the immune system will be 'energized' in preparation for viral and bacterial attack and be less active in auto-immune conditions and allergies, which is why these mushrooms are less often called 'immuno-stimulators', but rather 'immuno-regulators or modulators'.

Probably the oldest, or more correctly 'longest used' mushroom of the great Asian tree mushrooms is the Japanese mushroom **Reishi (*Ganoderma lucidum*)**. Reishi contains one of the most 'active' of the polysaccharides and is used in Japan both a cancer treatment and a treatment for the auto-immune disease myasthenia gravis. Besides polysaccharides, Reishi contains

another class of substance not found in other tree mushrooms called *ganoderic acids*. These acids have a similar structure to steroid hormones and have a number of additional health benefits. They increase the anti-allergic effects of Reishi. They improve the body's oxygen consumption and utilization which in turn translates into reduced cholesterol and reduced symptoms of cardiovascular conditions like blockage, angina, irregularities, and it also reduces memory loss.

Reishi is also an anti-histaminic mushroom, meaning that it is effective in reducing symptoms of allergy attacks as well as other common auto-immune system condition symptoms.

Another very famous and very effective tree mushroom is **Shitake (*Lentinus edodes*)** which has two unique immune-enhancing abilities. There is a naturally occurring immune enhancing system in the body called "complement". The complement system is made up of eleven major proteins labeled C1-C11 that interact with each other. The Shitake polysaccharide activates the C3 complement and therefore activates the whole complement cascade which dramatically enhances immune-stimulation.

The other unique property of Shitake is its antiviral properties. While other tree mushrooms are also anti-viral, Shitake accomplishes this in a unique method. It stimulates particular immune cells that produce interferon, a chemical substance that prevents viruses from replicating. Studies have shown that Shitake blocks the replication of HIV as well as prevents the infection of target cells.

**Coriolus versicolor**, also known as the **Turkey Tail mushroom** (you can imagine why) is another of the tree mushrooms that ranks among the most respected, the most powerful, and thankfully, the most common. It's unique polysaccharide called PSK is routinely used as an adjunct to chemotherapy because it consistently reduces cancer reoccurrence and increased disease-free survival rates. PSK is anti-microbial, anti-malarial, anti-tumor, and an anti-oxidant. Coriolus, in particular, has also been

shown to regenerate damaged bone marrow, increase energy levels and offer pain relief in cancer patients.

One of the more unusual of the tree mushrooms is the **Oyster Mushroom (Pleurotus ostreatus)**, so named because it looks, smells, and tastes almost exactly like oyster. It does, however, have powerful medicinal powers oysters definitely don't have. For example, it empowers T-cells and improves their ability to manufacture interferon and Interleukin-4, a cytokine that stimulates the proliferation of activated B-cells. Oyster mushroom also reduces and balances cholesterol.

**Maitake**, which means 'hen of the woods' due to its feathery appearance at the base of large oak trees. It was a highly valued medicinal mushroom, and was such great demand during the times of feudal Japan that it was said to be worth its weight in silver. Research, as recent as 2009, has shown Maitake's unique polysaccharide to have strong anti-cancer and anti-tumor properties. Maitake may partially inhibit the enzyme cyclooxygenase (the same enzyme which is the target of Advil, Tylenol, and other similar pain relievers. Another experiment also showed that an extract of Maitake inhibited angiogenesis, the growth and creation of new blood vessels, which is also the method through which tumors transition from a dormant state into a malignant one.

In Summary:

- **Reishi** - Lowers cholesterol, Improves oxygen utilization, Reduces symptoms of cardiovascular blockage and coronary heart disease, Anti-histaminic, Immuno-regulator.
- **Shitake** - Anti-Viral, Anti-Tumor, Increases resistance to bacterial, viral and fungal infections, Anti-influenza, Anti-hepatitis.
- **Turkey Tail Mushroom** - Anti-microbial, Anti-malarial, Anti-oxidant, Anti-tumor, and Immuno-modulator.
- **Oyster Mushroom** - Cholesterol modulator and immune system enhancer.

- **Maitake** - Pain reliever, Anti-tumor, adjunct to chemotherapy in Japan.

Only a few of the more famous and prestigious of the tree mushrooms have been discussed here. There is a whole field of medical research devoted to medicinal mushrooms that goes back thousands of years. Modern scientific research methods are being employed to discover the biological and bio-chemical explanations for the myriad of healing powers that have been observed for centuries.

While each of these mushrooms has tremendous benefits and abilities on its own, even greater benefits are attainable when they are taken together. In this way, their abilities complement each other and a more complete stimulation of the immune system means greater protection from the plethora of bacteria and viruses waging their endless battle for human body dominance.

Another thing to consider is that even though a lot of references were made to the benefits some of these mushrooms have for cancer treatment, this is only because there is a strong drive for further research in this area and one should not ignore the fact that these mushrooms provide strong *overall* immune system stimulation and enhancement. A healthy and vibrant immune system is one of the best defenses for protecting yourself from even minor ailments like colds and flus. Reishi is even used as a sedative in some places. Even though they are being used for something as serious as cancer, don't ignore the simpler, or smaller, but equally frustrating ailments like allergies and viral infection.



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