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Are they really healthy?

WHILE the consumption of birds' nests has riled some and is misunderstood by others, the Chinese swear by the health properties of these nests created by swiftlets.

A gelatinous bowl of double-boiled birds' nests is believed to slow ageing, improve the complexion, cure coughs, and even improve your sex drive!

Are birds' nests really healthy or are they merely a status symbol prized by the Chinese – all the way since the Tang Dynasty (618CE-907CE), by the way.

“Extracts of birds' nests were found to have a direct stimulating effect on cell renewing and regeneration. They may also slow down the ageing process,” says Dr Christopher Lim, kidney specialist, Universiti Putra Malaysia associate professor, and swiftlet farmer.



In Chinese traditional medicine, bird's nest is recommended for a dry, heaty, chronic cough with blood stained phlegm. – File photo courtesy of Eu Yan Sang

Research conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong has discovered that the soluble glycol protein and amino acids (aspartic acid, glutamic acid, praline, theonine, and valine) in the saliva the swiftlets use to construct their nests could strengthen the human immune system and promote good skin.

One of the major components of the carbohydrates found in the saliva is sialic acid. It has been found that exogenous (originating outside the body) sources of sialic acid may contribute to neurological and intellectual advantages in infants.

The birds' saliva also contains glucosamine, a substance that reportedly protects joints from degenerating.

Researchers at the University of Shizuoka in Japan have discovered that extracts from edible bird nests contain anti-flu properties.

Elderly people believe that cave nests are better as it takes up to three hours to double boil them while nests farmed in houses or other manmade structures take only 30 minutes. Dr Lim has a different view, though.

“If the proteins take three hours of double boiling to break down, they might not be easily digested in the human body,” he says. “Furthermore, cave nests have a higher sodium and mineral content, which may be unsuitable for those with high blood pressure, kidney stones, or thalassemia.

“Birds' nests are one of the most nutritious organic foods available and are absolutely halal,” he adds.

■ *Some information sourced from 'Make Millions from Swiftlet Farming: A Definitive Guide' by Dr Christopher Lim.*

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