

Hu Tao Ren - The Walnut and Sperm Health

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As the supermarkets start to put their festive Fruit & Nut selections out on the shelves, we take a closer look at Hu Tao Ren, the Walnut. Originally from the Middle East (Persia), the English name comes from the Germanic Old English *wealhnutu*, literally meaning foreign nut! The walnut is now found all over the world and has been used in TCM for many years.

The clue as to why it has been in the press recently is found in its botanical name, Semen Juglandis. A study published in the journal, 'Biology of Reproduction' found that, after twelve weeks, men who added a couple of handfuls of walnuts to their diet every day had better sperm shape, movement and vitality.

"The study involved 117 men between the ages of 21 and 35, who were divided into two groups. One group added 2.6 ounces (75 grams) of whole-shelled walnuts to their daily diet. The other group continued their usual diet but avoided eating tree nuts. Both groups ate a typical Western-style diet. Lead author, Prof Wendie Robbins from UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health said: "We found a significant improvement in sperm parameters in the group that consumed the walnuts. " The men who ate no tree nuts saw no change." Sperm quality improved in terms of concentration, vitality, movement, shape and chromosome abnormalities[i]."

In TCM Hu Tao Ren is used to tonify the kidneys and replenish the *Jing*, the Chinese word for 'essence,' specifically kidney essence. Jing is responsible for regeneration and reproduction. It regulates the body's growth and development and works with Qi to help protect the body from harmful external factors. "According to tradition, Jing is stored in the kidneys and is the most dense physical matter within the body (like Qi and Shen). It is said to be the material basis for the physical body and is yin in nature, which means it nourishes, fuels, and cools the body. Jing is also believed by some to be the carrier of our heritage (similar to DNA). Production of semen, in the man, and menstrual blood (or pregnancy), in the woman, are believed to place the biggest strains on jing.[ii]

Walnuts have many other uses in TCM, from treating weakness in the knees and lower back, coughs, and constipation to treating prematurely grey hair! Walnut oil can also be used externally for some skin conditions.