

Snow Fungus (*Tremella fuciformis*)

Common Names: Bai mu erh, shirokikurage, silver tree-ear fungus, white jelly-leaf, white muer, white tree-ear, wood ear fungus.

Location: Snow fungus grows on a great variety of trees throughout Asia and in warmer climates worldwide.

Description: Snow fungus is a white, nearly translucent, “trembling” fungus. It gets its common name of “wood ear” for the way it looks on decaying logs on which it grows. Good quality snow fungus has a pale, yellowish-white color and a mucilagelike texture.

Properties: Chinese and Japanese herbalists have used snow fungus for more than 2,000 years, primarily to increase fluids in the body, for dry coughs, and for palpitations. It has been used as a tonic herb and as a beauty enhancer to improve the complexion.

Uses: Snow fungus is an immune stimulant that fights infection, especially chronic infections. Studies have found that it also demonstrates anti-tumor activity, lowers levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or “bad” cholesterol), protects the liver, and fights inflammation. It may also slow the aging process. Supposedly, if snow fungus is eaten regularly, facial freckles will disappear, although this has not been tested in any scientific fashion. Benefits of snow fungus for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: atherosclerosis, high cholesterol, and cancer. For cancer treatment, snow fungus can increase the production of interferon and interleukin-2 (IL-2), two important immune-system chemicals, and stimulate the production of germ-eating macrophages. Snow fungus also increases the activity of natural killer cells and enhances the effectiveness of antibodies. In addition, snow fungus reduces the rate at which cancers spread. In order to spread, tumors have to establish their own blood vessel systems. Snow fungus compounds counteract a blood chemical called platelet-activating factor, which makes the blood less likely to clot and spin a fibrin “net” on which blood vessels to serve the tumor can form. Lab tests have shown that snow fungus extracts kill cervical cancer cells, as well as those taken from other types of tumors. Snow fungus is known to sensitize the cervix and uterus to radiation treatment, making it more effective. One of the most valuable medical uses of snow fungus is to prevent leukopenia, or low white blood cell counts, in people undergoing chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer.

Doses: Snow fungus is available as an extract and in an over-the-counter patent medicine called Yin Mi Pian.

Warnings: Like all other “jelly fungi,” snow fungus has no known toxicity and also can be eaten as a food.