

## She finds lead pieces in cordyceps she bought



Zaobao

**THE** next time you buy the herbal root, cordyceps, check to see if pieces of lead have been inserted in them to make them heavier.

Madam Ni Hui Zhen, 34, a production worker, had a shock when she found that the one she bought to make soup for her five-year-old son had several pieces of lead hidden in them.

The discovery was made last Wednesday when she tasted the

soup and bit into a piece of cordyceps. But no matter how hard she bit, it remained unbroken. Upon close examination, she found a piece of lead lodged tightly in the fibrous herb, which is sold here in dried form.

She also found another piece of cordyceps with hidden lead, and small pieces of lead at the bottom of the soup pot.

Madam Ni had bought a tael, or

38g, of the herb, said to be good for people with asthma, in a Chinese medicine shop in town last month. It was for her son who has asthma.

Madam Ni told Lianhe Zaobao: "Now I'm worried that the first half of the amount I bought, which I had cooked and consumed, was also filled with lead."

According to the US Food and Drug Administration, lead poisoning can occur in a child if there is at least 100 micrograms of lead in every litre of blood.

Symptoms typically include abdominal pains, diarrhoea and giddiness, and, if left untreated over time, can lead to mental retardation.

Cordyceps is commonly used to alleviate other respiratory problems, such as chronic cough and wheezing.

When contacted by Madam Ni, staff at the Chinese medicine shop told her that they were unaware of the lead pieces.

Two years ago, Lianhe Zaobao reported that farmers in China used iron nails or steel wires to join pieces of cordyceps that had broken during harvest.

Lead pieces were later added to increase the weight of the herb to fetch a higher selling price.