

From our friends at "Back to Herbs"



Ashwagandha Root (*Withania somnifera*)

Ashwagandha root comes from the ashwagandha plant and it is an essential herb used in herbal medicine. Other names used for referring to this particular root include Indian ginseng and winter cherry. Being a powerful adaptogen, ashwagandha root can enhance the ability of the body to tolerate both mental and physical stress.

It is a medicinal plant that is widely used in Palestine for the treatment of various inflammatory disorders. The plant, also known as Indian ginseng is widely used in the Ayurvedic system of medicine to treat tumors, inflammation, arthritis, asthma, and hypertension. Chemical investigation of the roots and leaves of this plant has yielded bioactive withanolides. Earlier studies showed that withanolides inhibit cyclooxygenase enzymes, lipid peroxidation, and proliferation of tumor cells.



Withania somnifera is classified in Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, as a rasayana, a group of plant derived drugs which promote physical and mental health, augment resistance of the body against disease and diverse adverse environmental factors, revitalize the body in debilitated conditions and increase longevity.

Ashwagandha root is commonly used for:

- Anti-anxiety
- Anti-inflammation
- Fever reduction
- Protection against infectious disease
- Memory
- Immune system support
- General health

Studies have also shown that the root may have GABA-like properties (gamma-aminobutyric acid, the main inhibitory neurotransmitter in the human body, which may explain its reported ability to support anti-anxiety.

Ashwagandha in Sanskrit means "horse's smell," probably originating from the odor of its root which resembles that of a sweaty horse.

Citing a total of 31 studies, the Indian Central Council for Research on Ayurveda and Siddha tells us that ashwaganda root exerts its most powerful pharmacological influence on the reproductive system, neuropharmacological disorders, cardiovascular system, respiratory system, bacteria, fungi, inflammation and gastric acidity. Some preliminary evidence points to a positive action on the thyroid gland.

Ashwagandha Actions according to Ayurveda include:

- increases sexual desire
- rejuvenates the body
- increases strength
- improves quality and quantity of semen
- is useful in management of white discoloration of the skin
- is useful in management of edematous conditions
- is useful in emaciation and under nutritive condition
- is considered an adaptogen, which is a nontoxic herb that works on a nonspecific basis to normalize physiological function, working on the HPA axis (the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis) and the neuroendocrine system.

Research supports the use of Ashwagandha for arthritis. In a double blind, placebo-controlled crossover study, 42 patients with osteoarthritis received a formula containing Ashwagandha or placebo for three months. Patients were evaluated for one month, prior to treatment, during which time all previous drugs were withdrawn. During both the pre-treatment and treatment phase, pain and disability scores were evaluated weekly. The herb significantly reduced the severity of pain and disability scores for arthritis.

A reason for the root's eminence as a universal disease-preventing, energy-promoting tonic may well be its outcome on the human immune system. Several clinical studies have evidenced important increases in white blood cell. Ashwagandha could also feature a gentle relaxant result on the central nervous system. It is commonly used to improve vitality, especially when recouping from degenerative illnesses and pain containment for arthritic conditions. It may also facilitate an improvement in blood sugar, which helps in oppressing sugar cravings.

Preliminary research indicate that the herbaceous plant helps to scale down the negative consequences of stress, retards tumor development, treats insomnia and anxiety, reduces cholesterol, and can improve sexual performance. Clinical research illustrates ashwagandha might well be a promising alternative or addition for cancer care and prevention. Ashwagandha seems to show positive outcomes on the cardio, endocrine, and central nervous system. It is an herb that facilitates the human body to level its own thyroid hormones.

Ashwagandha is used to rejuvenate man's libido, remedy impotency and increase male fertility. It's commonly practiced in south Asia as a tonic for male sexuality.

Because the root has traditionally been utilized to treat diverse diseases affiliated with nerve damage attached to the corrosive molecules acknowledged as free radicals, a few investigators have theorized the herb might hold antioxidant dimensions. Free-radical harm plays a part in natural aging, and with neurologic circumstances like epilepsy, Alzheimer's disease, and Parkinson's disease.

Numerous studies have shown positive results with the use of Ashwagandha. Studies already completed provide evidence that it helps in easing drug withdrawal symptoms and in reducing anxiety and painful arthritis of the knees. Ongoing studies for

Ashwagandha use in tuberculosis, Parkinson's Disease, bone cancer, bipolar disorder, diabetes and improving the well-being of the elderly and breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy are either currently underway or recently completed.

Following a search of MEDLINE and EBSCO databases, it can be concluded that *Withania somnifera* reduces tumor cell proliferation while increasing overall animal survival time. Furthermore, it has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of radiation therapy while potentially mitigating undesirable side effects. *Withania somnifera* also reduces the side effects of chemotherapeutic agents cyclophosphamide and paclitaxel without interfering with the tumor reducing actions of the drugs. These effects have been demonstrated in vitro on human cancer cell lines, and in vivo on animal subjects, but there have been no human trials to date. Given its broad spectrum of cytotoxic and tumor sensitizing actions, *Withania somnifera* presents itself as a novel complementary therapy for integrative oncology care.

Preliminary studies have found various constituents of ashwagandha exhibit a variety of therapeutic effects with little or no associated toxicity. These results are very encouraging and indicate this herb should be studied more extensively to confirm these results and reveal other potential therapeutic effects.

While *Withania somnifera* has not been extensively studied for thyroid health to date, some patients say that short-term use of Ashwagandha, or its periodic use, provides relief from symptoms of hypothyroidism, most notably chronic fatigue and decreased sexual libido. It is advised to work with a medical practitioner before, during and after a decision to implement Ashwagandha usage for thyroid health.



Be sure to try NSP's 5-HTP Power (60 caps) or Adaptamax® (100 caps).

References:

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Yours in Good Health!

Sincerely,

Chris Ritchason
Dr. Jack & Verlyn Ritchason, Founders
The Back to Herbs Team

This information was provided by

Chuck & Judy Erkfitz

Natures Better Way

PO Box 261 - 880 W Dryden Rd., Metamora, MI 48455

www.naturesbetterway.com

www.naturesbetterway.my4life.com

www.mynsp.com/naturesbetterway

1-810-678-3131 erkfitz@erkfitz.com