

## Maca

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**Maca (*Lepidium meyenii*) is a radish-like tuberous root having numerous health benefits. Maca is a member of the Brassicaceae family, which includes turnips and radishes.** A highly nutritious food, it contains carbohydrates, proteins, calcium, fiber and lipids, as well as iodine and anticancer compounds similar to those found in cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli and cabbage. It also contains antioxidants, such as catechins, which also are found in green tea, and sterols similar to those found in echinacea.



Maca has been grown and cultivated in the Peruvian Andes of South America for nearly 2,600 years. Grown in an altitude of 9,000 to 14,000 feet above sea level, maca is the highest altitude crop on earth.

Maca is powerfully abundant in amino acids, phytonutrients, healthy fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals. This superfood (foods that are nutrient-dense and offer tremendous dietary and healing potential) has the ability to increase energy and stamina, oxygenate the blood, support neurotransmitter production, and enhance libido.

Maca works to effectively help the body adapt to the high levels of stress involved in modern living. This adaptive mechanism involves normalization of both men's and women's hormonal imbalances. Instead of supplying plant hormones such as phytoestrogens, maca acts on the hypothalamic-pituitary axis (HPA) system that is the precursor of male and female hormones. It also has an effect on the adrenal glands. Maca does not necessarily stimulate, but acts in a regulatory fashion balancing and returning homeostasis.

In today's world, adaptogens such as maca take on a greater significance than in the past, because of constantly increasing levels of stress. Dr. Hans Selye, Nobel Prize winning author of several works on adaptation, was the first to demonstrate the existence of biological stress. He described how the human body adapts to stress, and the stages it passes through when the stress goes unmitigated. He pointed out that positive or negative, stress is still stress and it differs from all other physical responses. Selye first described the HPA axis system whereby the body copes with stress. He pointed to an "alarm state", a "resistance state", and an "exhaustion state", largely referring to glandular states. Later he developed the idea of two "reservoirs" of stress resistance, or what he referred to as "alternative" stress energy.

Instead of providing hormones to the body, maca working as an adaptogen responds to different bodies' needs individually. If you're producing too much of a particular hormone, maca will regulate the production downward. However, if you're producing too little, it will stimulate production.

Hormones regulate many things including mood, growth, sexual development, and tissue function. Hormones also play a role in many diseases, like cancer and depression. Maca root has been shown to be beneficial for all sorts of hormonal problems including PMS, menopause, and hot flashes. Some women use maca to help with menopausal symptoms to combat frigidity and help maintain a healthy sex drive, which can often suffer during the menopause. Maca is also enhances fertility and is best known for improving libido and sexual function, especially in men. For this reason, it's earned the nickname "nature's Viagra."

### **The Health Benefits of Maca for the Endocrine System**

Maca, also known as Peruvian maca, macca or maca root is one of the most nutritious foods known and is used by many health enthusiasts for its potent natural healing abilities, especially healing of the endocrine system.

The endocrine system is made up of seven major glands (pineal, pituitary, thyroid, thymus, adrenals, sexual glands) in the body and the hormones they secrete to keep us in emotional and physical balance and good health. Although it is not yet fully understood how maca has such a positive effect on the endocrine system, studies show that maca has a stabilizing/regulating effect.

### **Adrenal Health Benefits of Maca**

The adrenal glands in particular seem to be positively affected by maca and this provides several emotional/physical benefits for health. The adrenals are the glands that release stress hormones into our bodies leading to emotional stress, feelings of fear, erratic energy levels, predisposing the body to deposit fat to the abdomen area, increasing blood pressure and increasing our risk factor of heart disease.

### **Encourages Muscle Growth**

Researchers are discovering that athletes who use maca have found it to be a natural alternative to the use of anabolic steroids for muscle growth. Doctors at HealthGuidance.org report that unlike other substances, maca is a naturally occurring plant that contains no chemicals or other toxins that interfere with hormonal production in the body, making it a superior product for muscle growth.

### **Maca for Stress induced Migraine Headaches**

The word migraine derives from the Greek word hemikrania meaning "half a skull". The disorder was so named because migraines are typically unilateral (affecting one half of the head). Migraines are severe, vascular headaches often accompanied by symptoms such as persistent pain in the temple or behind the ear, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to sounds and light. Some migraines are preceded by an aura, which is a type of unusual visual or auditory sensory experience. For some, a migraine will last only a couple of hours. For others, the intense pain and discomfort can last up to 72 hours.

Some of the usual suspects such as stress, lack of exercise, allergies, irregular sleep patterns, caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol (particularly red wine) are implicated as possible causes of migraines headaches. Migraines involve excessive dilation or contraction of the brain's blood vessels. Nicotine is known to constrict blood vessels and red wine can contain sulfites which will cause a reaction in some people. Other potential stressors on blood vessels can be elevated estrogen levels or progesterone levels that are too low.

Maca powder is approximately 10 percent protein. The protein in maca contains twenty amino acids and seven of the eight essential amino acids. Although not a complete protein, maca is an excellent source of hormone precursors and amino acids.

Maca has a lipid content of about 2.2 percent, which includes linolenic acid, palmitic acid, and oleic acid. Maca is also a good source of sterols. Sterols have been shown to have immune enhancing properties.

Maca is rich in minerals such as calcium, magnesium, phosphorous, potassium, sulfur, sodium, and iron. Maca is also a great source of the trace minerals zinc, copper, selenium, iodine, bismuth, manganese, silicon, and tin. Maca also contains vitamin B1, vitamin B2, vitamin C, and vitamin E.



Be sure to try NSP's [Maca \(90 caps\)](#) or [X-Action® \(Women\) \(100 caps\)](#).

### **References**

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## **Yours in Good Health!**

Sincerely,

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

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This information was provided by

***Chuck & Judy Erkfitz***

***Natures Better Way***

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

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1-810-678-3131 [erkfitz@erkfitz.com](mailto:erkfitz@erkfitz.com)