

From our friends at "Back to Herbs"



eFlash



## Valerian Root

Valerian root is native to Europe, South Africa, and parts of Asia and was introduced to North America. It grows to up to four feet high and has trumpet-shaped flowers. The roots are used medicinally. Although the fresh root is relatively odorless, the dried root has a strong odor that many find unpleasant.

Since ancient Greek and Roman times the plant has been used for a variety of medical disorders ranging from liver problems, digestive ailments, and urinary tract disorders to nausea and insomnia. Valerian has also been used for centuries for nervous conditions and has been traditionally used for sleeplessness, epilepsy, nervousness, hysteria and as a diuretic.



The herb was used in Germany for unruly children, as a coffee substitute by German women, and as a condiment in medieval times, and as a perfume in the 16th century. It has had many other uses across numerous cultures throughout the centuries.

As a folk remedy it is used for a variety of conditions such as sleeping problems, digestive complaints, nervousness, trembling, tension headaches and heart palpitations. Valerian's popularity waned with the introduction of prescription sleep medication. One possible advantage of valerian, however, is that it may not have as much of a "hangover" effect on mental or physical functioning the following day. Also, people taking sleeping pills sometimes have a temporary worsening of insomnia when they are discontinued, an effect that hasn't been reported with valerian.

In the mid-19th century, valerian was considered a stimulant that caused some of the same complaints it is thought to treat and was generally held in low esteem as a medicinal herb. During World War II, it was used in England to relieve the stress of air raids.

In ayurveda, valerian is considered to work on the nervous, digestive, and respiratory systems as a stimulant, antispasmodic, stomachic, sedative, analeptic, carminative, and nervine.

Valerian seems to act like a sedative on the brain and nervous system. Valerian has often been used in complementary and alternative medicine for its sedative properties. It has been recommended for epilepsy but that has not been supported by modern

research.

Valerian has an affinity for GABAA receptors, likely due to the relatively high GABA content in valerian itself. The amount of GABA present in valerian extract is sufficient to induce release of GABA in synaptosomes and may also inhibit GABA reuptake.



Due to the herb's historical use as an anti-convulsant, sedative, migraine treatment and pain reliever, most basic research has been focused on the interaction of valerian constituents with the GABA neurotransmitter. The findings of these studies remain inconclusive. Thus, the true mechanism of action of valerian remains unknown. Its activity may result from interactions among multiple constituents rather than any one compound or class of compounds. The content of

volatile oils, including valerenic acids; the less volatile sesquiterpenes; or the valepotriates (esters of short-chain fatty acids) is sometimes used to standardize valerian extracts. As with most herbal preparations, many other compounds are also present. Valerian is sometimes combined with other botanicals.

Valerian is used for muscle and joint pain. Some women use valerian for menstrual cramps and symptoms associated with menopause, including hot flashes and anxiety.

Valerian is also used for conditions connected to psychological stress including nervous asthma, hysterical states, excitability, fear of illness (hypochondria), headaches, migraine, and stomach upset.

Some people use valerian for depression, mild tremors, epilepsy, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Sometimes, valerian is added to bath water to help with restlessness and sleep disorders.

The American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) gives valerian a class 1 safety rating, indicating that it is a safe herb with a wide dosage range. Some people, however, experience adverse reactions to valerian. Rather than feeling the calming or sleep-inducing effects, they suddenly feel nervous, anxious and restless after taking the herb and may experience heart palpitations.

Other names: All-heal, Amantilla, Setwall, Setewale, Capon's Tail, Valeriana officinalis

The effectiveness ratings for VALERIAN are as follows:

Possibly effective for...

- Inability to sleep (insomnia). Valerian does not relieve insomnia as fast as "sleeping pills." Continuous use for several days, even up to four weeks, may be needed before an effect is noticeable. Valerian seems to improve the sleep quality of people who are withdrawing from the use of sleeping pills

May be effective for:

- Anxiety. There is contradictory evidence about the effectiveness of valerian for anxiety. Some people have reported that it seems to reduce stress in social situations.
- Restlessness. A specific combination product, providing valerian root extract 160 mg and lemon balm leaf extract 80 mg has been tried to reduce symptoms of serious restlessness (dyssomnia) in children under the age of 12. Early results show it might be effective, but more research is needed.
- Depression
- Convulsions
- Mild tremors
- Epilepsy
- Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headache
- Stomach upset
- Menstrual pains
- Menopausal symptoms including hot flashes and anxiety
- Other conditions

More evidence is needed to rate the effectiveness of valerian for these uses.

Few adverse events attributable to valerian have been reported for clinical study participants. Headaches, dizziness, pruritus (a sensation that causes the desire or reflex to scratch), and gastrointestinal disturbances are the most common effects reported in clinical trials but similar effects were also reported for the placebo. Valerian is **LIKELY SAFE** for most people when used in medicinal amounts short-term. Clinical studies have reported safe use of valerian for medicinal purposes in over 12,000 people in trials lasting up to 28 days. The safety of long-term use is unknown. Some information suggests that valerian might also be safe when taken by children for 4-8 weeks.

Valerian might cause sleepiness and drowsiness. Do not take in combination with sedatives, alcohol, or medications that are changed or broken down in the liver. Effects on pregnant or lactating women have not been performed to substantiate safety.



Be sure to try NSP's Valerian Root (100 caps), Valerian Root Extract T/R (60 tabs) or Joint Support (100 caps).

## References:

<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Valerian-HealthProfessional/>  
<http://altmedicine.about.com/cs/herbsvitaminsr/a/Valerian.htm>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valerian\\_\(herb\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valerian_(herb))  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/870.html>

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**Yours in Good Health!**

Sincerely,

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The Back to Herbs Team

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