



## **VALERIAN (*Valeriana officinalis*) root**

### **COMMON INDICATIONS:**

- Relaxation and anxiety relief
- Short-term insomnia relief

### **General Comments:**

Since the second century A.D., Valerian has been used to ease insomnia, anxiety, and nervous restlessness. The name is believed to come from the Latin word "valere" meaning to be healthy or strong. Hippocrates described valerian's therapeutic uses, and in the 2nd century, Galen prescribed valerian for insomnia. The genus Valerian includes over 250 species, but *V. officinalis* is the species most often used in dietary supplements. Valerian is often combined with other sedative herbs, including hops (*Humulus lupulus*) and passionflower (*Passiflora incarnate*).

### **Benefits & Mechanism of Action:**

#### Relaxation and Anxiolytic Effects

The usefulness of valerian is reported to be due to several principal components, including valepotriates, valeric acid and pungent oils, which have a relaxing and anxiolytic effect on the central nervous system, as well as a relaxing effect on the smooth muscles of the GI tract. Scientists believe valepotriates and valeric acid bind gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptor sites similar to benzodiazepines, thus the similarity in therapeutic effects (Yuan et al, 2004).

#### Insomnia Treatment

In addition to a calming and anxiolytic effect, valerian is also often used to treat insomnia. Benzodiazepines are often used to treat both anxiety and insomnia; however, they often leave patients feeling "hungover" the next day. Valerian has been reported to have sedative effects similar to those of benzodiazepines without inducing languor the next day. In one study, 100 women aged 50-60 years who complained of sleep disorders were studied and Valerian was found to significantly reduce levels of sleep disorder compared to placebo (Taavoni et al, 2013).

### **DOSE:**

- 200-500mg of a standardized extract, 1-2 hours before bedtime or as needed
- 30- 60 drops of a liquid extract (1:4w/v) in water 1 hour before bedtime or as needed may be used.

- Valerian supplements should be used for the temporary relief of insomnia only.

#### **STANDARDIZATION:**

- Valerian supplements should be standardized to contain 0.4-1% valerenic or valeric acids.

#### **CAUTIONS & SIDE EFFECTS:**

- Valerian has been reported to be safe in recommended doses.
- Use with caution if pregnant or breastfeeding as the safety of valerian has not been studied in these populations.
- Do not use if there is an allergy to any component of this dietary supplement.
- Use with caution when driving an automobile or heavy machinery.
- Caution should be used when taking sedative medications concomitantly with valerian. These include: Antihistamines, Anticonvulsants, such as phenytoin (Dilantin) and valproic acid (Depakote), Barbiturates, Benzodiazepines, such as alprazolam (Xanax) and diazepam (Valium), drugs to treat insomnia, such as zolpidem (Ambien), zaleplon (Sonata), eszopiclone (Lunesta), and ramelteon (Rozerem), Tricyclic antidepressants, such as amitriptyline (Elavil), and Alcohol.

#### **References:**

##### ANXIOLYTIC

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##### TREATMENT OF INSOMNIA

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on sleep structure and sleep quality. *Pharmacopsychiatry* 2000;33(2):47-53.

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