

Valerian

This fact sheet provides basic information about the herb valerian—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Valerian is a plant native to Europe and Asia; it is also found in North America. Valerian has been used as a medicinal herb since at least the time of ancient Greece and Rome. Its therapeutic uses were described by Hippocrates, and in the 2nd century, Galen prescribed valerian for insomnia.

Common Names—valerian, all-heal, garden heliotrope

Latin Name—*Valeriana officinalis*

What It Is Used For

- Valerian has long been used for sleep disorders and anxiety.
- Valerian has also been used for other conditions, such as headaches, depression, irregular heartbeat, and trembling.

How It Is Used

The roots and rhizomes (underground stems) of valerian are typically used to make supplements, including capsules, tablets, and liquid extracts, as well as teas.

What the Science Says

- Research suggests that valerian may be helpful for insomnia, but there is not enough evidence from well-designed studies to confirm this.
- There is not enough scientific evidence to determine whether valerian works for anxiety or for other conditions, such as depression and headaches.
- Recent NCCAM-funded research on valerian includes studies on the herb's effects on sleep in healthy older adults and in people with Parkinson's disease.

Side Effects and Cautions

- Studies suggest that valerian is generally safe to use for short periods of time (for example, 4 to 6 weeks).
- No information is available about the long-term safety of valerian.
- Valerian can cause mild side effects, such as headaches, dizziness, upset stomach, and tiredness the morning after its use.
- Tell your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

Sources

Office of Dietary Supplements and National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. *Questions and Answers About Valerian for Insomnia and Other Sleep Disorders*. Office of Dietary Supplements Web site. Accessed at <http://www.ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/valerian.asp> on July 10, 2007.

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For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view:

- *What's in the Bottle? An Introduction to Dietary Supplements* at nccam.nih.gov/health/bottle/
- *Herbal Supplements: Consider Safety, Too* at nccam.nih.gov/health/supplement-safety/

NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: info@nccam.nih.gov

CAM on PubMed

Web site: nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Valerian Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-valerian.html

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