

# The Insomnia Epidemic

Herbal support for restful sleep  
and a balanced nervous  
system

Presented by Dr. Arianna Staruch, ND at the 3rd Annual ACHS Herb Day Celebration

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## Insomnia

- Difficulty falling asleep
  - More than 15 minutes to fall asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep
  - Waking often and trouble returning to sleep
- Sleep problems lasting more than 3 months

Educational information only; Not meant to diagnose or treat; These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA;

## Insomnia: a Common Complaint

- One of the most common reasons for seeing a primary care provider
- Negative impact on health
  - Loss of energy
  - Loss of regeneration and repair time
  - Daytime drowsiness and irritability

## Stress Related disorder

- Daytime stress contributes to nighttime sleep problems
- Sleep problems at night contributes to daytime anxiety and depression

## The stress response

- Produces the “fight or flight response” – provides the energy & strength to fight or run away from the danger.
- Release of adrenaline into the bloodstream, along with other stress hormones including norepinephrine & cortisol.

## Symptoms of excess stress

- Physical – fatigue, headache, insomnia, muscle aches, heart palpitations, chest pain, abdominal cramps, nausea, trembling, cold extremities, flushing/sweating, frequent infections
- Mental – decreased memory & concentration, indecision, mental foginess, loss of sense of humor

## Symptoms of excess stress

- Emotional – anxiety, nervousness, depression, anger, frustration, worry, fear, irritability, impatience
- Behavioral – pacing, fidgeting, nervous habits, increased eating, smoking or drinking, crying, yelling, blaming, throwing things

## Sleep Apnea

- Sleep apnea can cause major health problems
- Common sign is excessive daytime sleepiness
- Common in overweight individuals but not exclusively
- Loud snoring often present
- See your PCP for referral to a sleep clinic

## Sleep Hygiene

- Good sleep is a learned behavior
- Go to sleep and awaken the same time every day
- Avoid stimulating activities before bed
- Avoid dietary stimulants
- Keep room completely dark
- Bedroom is a place of rest and relaxation

## Female Hormones and sleep

- Estrogen is stimulating, progesterone calming
- Estrogen dominance common with PMS and perimenopause
- Warm flushes and night sweats can interrupt sleep
- Spicy foods and alcohol make hot flashes worse

## Natural support for hormones

- Adrenal support
  - Vitamins C, B5, B6, licorice, rhodiola
- Phytoestrogens
  - Black cohosh, Dong quai, motherwort
- Bio-identical progesterone cream
- Consider bio-identical hormone replacement with your Naturopathic physician

## Supplements to Promote Restful Sleep

- Melatonin
- 5 hydroxytryptophan, 5HTP
- Calcium and magnesium

## Melatonin

- A hormone that influences the pineal gland and the sleep-wake cycle
- Helpful for jet lag
- Best used short term

## 5 HTP

- Tryptophan is an amino acid
- 5HTP is a serotonin precursor
- Serotonin and melatonin work together in the pineal gland
- Serotonin also support mood
- Found to be helpful with the sleep problems of Fibromyalgia

## Calcium and Magnesium

- Relax the nervous system and the muscles
- Take your bone support supplement at bedtime
- Ca:Mg 2:1 or 1:1
- Increase magnesium if constipation is a problem

## Herbal support

- Nervine herbs support the health of the nervous system
- Range in potency from mild to more drug like
- Adaptogens help the body deal with stress



## Nervines

- Chamomile and catnip
- Skullcap, passion flower, motherwort
- Hops, oats
- Valerian
- St. John's wort and Kava kava

## Mild Nervines

- Chamomile and Catnip
- Gentle enough to use with children
- Commonly used as a tea

## Moderate Nervines

- Hops and Oats are nourishing to the nervous system
- Hops may have a slight estrogenic effect, help for women but not for children
- Skullcap and passionflower have been studied for use with recovery from addiction

## Stronger Nervines

- Valerian used alone can cause agitation in a small percentage of people
- St. John's wort has had many studies showing support for mild to moderate depression
- Kava kava supportive for anxiety mixed with depression. Large amounts can be addictive

## Adaptogens

- Rhodiola
- Eleutherococcus
- Licorice root
- Astragalus
- Shitake and Mitake

## Rhodiola & Eleuthro

- Recent promising studies on support for dealing with stress and stress related effects
- Previously known as Siberian ginseng, Eleutherococcus has long been used to help the body deal with stress

## Licorice Root

- Licorice one of the best herbs to support the adrenal glands
- Constituents similar to the hormones made by the adrenal gland
- Should not be used by those with high blood pressure
- DGL forms useful for GI tract do not support adrenal gland

## Immune Support

- Stress can weaken immune system
- Frequent colds add stress to your life
- Shitake (*Lentinus edodes*)
- Astragalus
  - Used to support immune system
  - Switch to echinacea if you have a fever

## Use Supplements Wisely

- Research and ask question
  - Pubmed; Books
- Ask your health care provider
- Don't get fooled by hype or fads
- Just because its natural doesn't mean it is right for you!
- Listen to your body

## Exercise

- The ultimate stress buster
- Dissipates the excess energy from the stress response.
- Choose things you like, try classes
- Have an exercise buddy
- Walk

## Flexibility

- Life is about change.
- Try new ways of dealing with problems.
- Change direction when it is in your best interest.
- Let others do things their way.
- Don't should upon yourself.

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