

Valerian

Latin Name: *Valeriana officinalis*

Also known as: English Valerian, Cat's Valerian, All-Heal, Setwall, Setewale, Garden Heliotrope, Capon's Tail, Vandal Root, Amantilla, Phu

Scientific Classification

There are over 200 species in the *Valeriana* genus found worldwide. Valerian officinalis is sometimes classified into four sub-species because of a variety of plant characteristics, including whether it flourishes in damp or dry locations. All four variations have similar herbal qualities and are considered one herb in this text.

Family: Valerianaceae – valerian family
Genus: Valeriana – valerian
Species: *V. officinalis* – garden valerian

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Addictions</i>	alcoholism • hangover • drug addiction • smoking
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE • HYPERTENSION • HEART PALPITATIONS • dyspnea (shortness of breath)
<i>Blood Sugar</i>	hypoglycemia • diabetes
<i>Body System</i>	nerve healing stimulant (increases circulation and healing of nerves) • SEDATIVE (exerts a soothing or tranquilizing effect) • hypnotic (induces sleep) • fatigue • insomnia • restlessness • cramps • spasms • twitching spasms • stress • shock
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	aromatic (contains volatile oils which aid digestion and relieve gas) • heartburn • digestive disorders • stomach problems • gas • carminative (brings warmth and circulation, relieves intestinal gas discomfort, and promotes peristaltic movement) • ulcerated stomach • ulcers • intestines • colic (severe abdominal pain) • constipation • cathartic (strong laxative causing rapid evacuation) • parasiticide (kills parasites and worms) • expels worms
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	colds • coughs • antibacterial • fevers • diaphoretic (promotes perspiration) • scarlet fever • contagious diseases • measles • whooping cough • cholera (serious infectious disease with symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, and high fever) • typhoid (disease principally caused by infected water or food, with symptoms of high fever, ulcers, diarrhea,

	headache, and hemorrhages)
<i>Inflammation</i>	arthritis pain
<i>Liver</i>	liver protective
<i>Lungs & Respiration</i>	BRONCHIAL SPASMS
<i>Muscles</i>	MUSCLE SPASMS • lumbago (back pain)
<i>Nervous System</i>	nervine (improves nerve function) • nerve tonic (feeds and cushions nerves) • nerve weakness • NERVOUS CONDITIONS • NERVOUS SLEEPLESSNESS • despondency • delirium • NERVOUS BREAKDOWN • HYSTERIA • HYPOCHONDRIA • PAIN RELIEF • neuralgia (sharp, stabbing pains) • headaches • migraine headaches • vertigo • head congestion • ANTI-SPASMODIC • CONVULSIONS • epilepsy (brain disorder accompanied by periodic convulsions and loss of consciousness) • palsy • St. Vitus Dance (nerve disease characterized by irregular and involuntary movements) • paralysis
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Female:</i> • dysmenorrhea (painful or difficult menstruation) • promotes menstruation • menopause • menopausal headaches • menstrual cramps • uterine spasticity • AFTER-BIRTH PAINS
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	acne • skin eruptions
<i>Urinary Tract</i>	diuretic/antidiuretic (helps body regulate urine flow) • bladder • bladder gravel • lithotriptic (dissolves urinary stones)

Key Properties:

- NERVINE TONIC – feeds and tones the nerves, supports nerve function, helps rebuild nerve vitality, has a gentle, stimulating, healing action, especially cushions and heals nerve endings, eases pain and calms spasms, is indicated for nervous debility, weakness, overstimulation, and irritation
- SEDATIVE – calms frayed nerves and nervous energy, very soothing and quieting to the nervous system, relaxes the body, induces quality sleep, without ‘hangover’ feeling upon awakening
- Stimulating ANTISPASMODIC – supports, warms and heals the nerves, calms spastic nerve firing

Primarily affecting: NERVES

History

Early Greek physician Hippocrates (ca. 460-370 BC) recommended valerian use primarily for digestive problems, nausea, liver complaints and urinary tract disorders. Valerian root has been used as a sedative and for anxiety since pre-Christian times, and it is cited in virtually every pharmacopoeia in the world.

Discorides, a Greek physician (ca. 40-90 AD) recorded, 'The dry root is put into counterpoisons and medicines preservative against the pestilence.' Galen (ca. 129-217 AD), a prominent Roman physician, recommended valerian for insomnia and epilepsy. An Italian nobleman, Fabio Colonna (born in 1567), suffered from epilepsy. He came upon Galen's reference regarding the use of valerian for this affliction and took it. Colonna thereafter claimed it completely restored his health. Use of valerian to relieve spasms and induce sleep evolved in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The common name 'all-heal' arose from the popular medieval belief that it could cure almost anything (including the plague). The genus name, Valeriana, comes from the Latin 'valere', meaning 'to be in good health.'

Valerian root has been used for many centuries to calm all kinds of nervous disorders. It was supposedly taken as often as coffee by ladies in Germany, resulting in their lack of nervous irritability. During World War II, it was used in England to relieve the stress resulting from air raids.

Modern scientific studies on valerian in humans began in the 1970's, leading to its approval as a mild sedative and sleep aid by Germany's Commission E in 1985. Today, valerian is approved in the United States for use in flavoring foods and beverages such as root beer.

Dogs, cats and rats find the odd smell of the root irresistible. It is reputed to be the magical attractant carried by the Pied Piper of Hamelin, in the children's story of the same name.

As a child, my mother took valerian so that she could get off of prescription Valium.

Attributes

Key Components: (including, but not limited to)

Nutrients

Calcium • Copper • Magnesium • Potassium • other Trace Minerals

Volatile Oil (including Valerenic Acid) • Starches • Albumin

- Iridoids (also known as valepotriates)

Valerian is one of the best herbal sources of calcium and magnesium.

Valerian's volatile oil has a pale greenish color which becomes yellow and viscid with exposure. The oil contains esters similar to those found in rosemary. It develops the 'dirty sock - rotten cheese' odor during the drying process, when these esters undergo a chemical decomposition to iso-valerianic acid.

Valerian has more than 150 different chemical components, but it is not yet clear which ones are responsible for the herb's activities.

Nerve Health

Valerian supports nerve health and function. It particularly serves to cushion and heal frayed and stripped nerve endings. It naturally reduces tension and anxiety. Significant results have been obtained in cases of emotional (or mental) hysteria and hypochondria.

Nature's tranquilizer, valerian, calms and cushions the nerves, leaves no 'hangover' stupor upon waking, does not require increased dosage over time, is not habitual nor addictive, and improves quality of sleep.

Valerian improves coordination, tones nerves, and raises serotonin levels. It is especially active when an individual is in pain or under emotional stress. Valerian both excites and depresses the central nervous system (CNS). Before the sedative effect can be felt, components in valerian's essential oil must be broken down by body enzymes into valeramic acid (the calming element).

In a double-blind study of 48 participants, individuals in the valerian treated group reported less anxiety when placed under situations of 'social stress.'

Sedative

Valerian is the first remedy herbalists consider for calming the nervous system and promoting healthy sleep. It is a clinically proven sedative and sleep inducer. Its use is indicated when sleep disorders are a result of nervous tension, anxiety, exhaustion, headache, or hysteria.

Valerian affects the cerebro-spinal system. It is employed as a calming sedative of the primary nerve centers for afflictions such as St. Vitus Dance, nervous unrest, neuralgia pain,

epileptic fits, hysteria, and wakefulness. Valerian is very relaxing to the whole system without narcotic effect. It helps lower anxiety and aggression and promotes sleep when taken at night.

As one of the safest, best, and most gentle herbal sleeping remedies, valerian enhances the natural body process of slipping into sleep and helps to reduce stress. For individuals who do not need as much sleep as they once did, it also mellows lying awake in bed, ensuring a restful and relaxing experience. Conventional sleeping pills can have a marked impact on REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, but valerian does not interfere with this process.

Valerian's method of action is attributed to a number of its components, with no single ingredient considered to be the only active element. Knowledge of how valerian functions is still limited, but science has revealed more than one process.

Sleep cycles go through a sleep-wake rhythm throughout the night. The rhythm is related to natural changes in adenosine levels within the central nervous system (CNS). Studies have shown that administration of adenosine induces sleep. Valerian exhibits adenosine activity.

Valerian contains constituents that bind to adenosine receptors. This enables some of the valerian compounds to act partially like adenosine in the brain, yet they do not stimulate the receptor as fully as adenosine itself. The authors of these studies concluded that a valerian/hops combination extract functions as a sleep aid by suppressing wakefulness through the central nervous system (CNS) adenosine process. Also, they found the onset of its action to be relatively fast.

Whatever the process, results of studies have shown that use of valerian can produce an improvement in sleep quality. When valerian root function was studied in healthy young people, they experienced an easier and quicker descent into sleep.

In two randomized, blind, and placebo-controlled crossover trials, valerian (400-450 mg before bedtime) resulted in significantly improved sleep quality and decreased sleep latency, with no residual sedation in the morning. Habituation or addictions have not been noted.

<i>Muscle Relaxant</i>	Much research has demonstrated that valerian root has safe relaxing properties that work to slow down the central nervous system (CNS), calm nerves, relax muscles, and relieve muscle spasms. It can be used safely for muscle cramping, bronchial spasms, uterine cramps, and intestinal colic. Valerian will decrease both spontaneous and caffeine-stimulated muscular activity, significantly reduce aggressiveness, and alter a number of processes in the brain and nervous system. It has also been used since ancient times in the treatment of epilepsy.
<i>Heart</i>	Valerian is used for circulatory problems and suggested in cases of heart palpitation. Several of the alkaloids present in valerian have blood pressure lowering qualities. It slows the action of the heart, while increasing the strength of its beats. Valerian is used world-wide as a relaxing agent, for lowering hypertension and easing stress-related heart conditions.
<i>Women</i>	Valerian produces an exhilarating sensation and is especially useful for women of all ages who have emotional swings during their menstrual cycles. The tea or tincture will help reduce menstrual cramps and relieve menopause-induced headaches.
<i>Digestion</i>	Valerian stimulates glandular secretions of the stomach and increases intestinal peristalsis (contractions that propel contents onward). It helps to heal stomach ulcers and is powerful in preventing digestive fermentation and gas. Valerian has long been used as an anti-spasmodic to relieve stomach cramps and stress.
<i>Addictions</i>	Valerian root works counter to the hypnotic effects of alcohol and drugs. It has been used to assist the rehabilitation of many addicts. It serves as a substitute for some chemical medications, helping the addict sleep easier, and allowing relaxation and 'mellowing out.'
Herb Parts Used	The roots and rhizomes (underground stems) are used medicinally
Preparations and Remedies	<p>Roots and rhizomes may be dried and cut or powdered to put in infusions, capsules, extracts, and other herbal preparations.</p> <p>Never boil the root, as much of its therapeutic value is in the volatile oil that will evaporate in the steam.</p>

<p><i>Infusions</i></p> <p><i>External Wash</i></p> <p><i>Soothing Bath</i></p> <p><i>Vapor Inhalation</i></p> <p><i>Valerian Essential Oil</i></p>	<p>Make an infusion with 1 tablespoon of the cut and sifted root for every cup of water. Steep the valerian for 30 minutes in a closed pot. Drink about half a cup, once or twice daily to calm nerves and relieve insomnia, headaches, stress, and menstrual tension and discomfort.</p> <p>When taken hot, valerian will promote menstruation in women who are having difficulty. Drink hot valerian with cayenne pepper for heart palpitations.</p> <p>Give small doses of valerian infusion two to three times daily for restlessness of children with measles and scarlet fever and for infantile convulsions. A sound sleep will generally result.</p> <p>Both drink and externally apply valerian root tea for acne and irritated skin.</p> <p>An infusion of a half cup of the root may be used in a bath to relieve nervous exhaustion.</p> <p>Children can inhale vapors to quiet tension and encourage restful sleep.</p> <p>Diffuse or apply the essential oil topically (especially in a soothing massage) to calm, relax, ground, and balance emotions. It is also a sleep aid.</p>
<p>Safety</p>	<p>No health hazards or adverse side effects are known. Valerian is on the U.S. Federal Drug Administration's GRAS (generally recognized as safe) list and has been approved for use as a food.</p> <p>Valerian should not be taken with other central nervous system (CNS) sedatives, before driving, or in other situations when alertness is required.</p> <p>Over-dosage is highly unlikely, even with very large doses. For situations of extreme stress where a sedative or muscle relaxant effect is needed quickly, a single dose may be repeated two or three times at short intervals.</p> <p>Essential oils are potent, only a small amount is needed. They should never be put into the eyes nor directly contact mucous membranes. If contact burning occurs, soothe the area with a carrier oil such as almond or olive oil. Be careful to purchase only pure essential oils when using them for therapeutic purposes.</p>

Plant Profile	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> The valerian plant is found in Europe and the temperate regions of Asia and the United States. It grows in damp places, such as low-lying woods and meadows, along banks of rivers and lakes, and generally in marshy, swampy areas. However, some varieties flourish equally well in dry places.</p>
<i>Description</i>	<p>Valerian is a large, handsome perennial plant (after tops die down in the winter, it grows back from a persistent rootstock in the spring) that grows two to four feet high. The coarse, green, opposing, fernlike leaves (one to two and a half inches long) give off a sharp scent. They form rosettes, from which the tall stems grow.</p> <p>The pale green stem is thick, round, grooved, and hollow. It is branched at the top with large terminal clusters of small, lacy white or pale pink flowers that appear June through August. The flowers are agreeably fragrant. The fruit is a capsule containing one oblong compressed seed, easily carried away with the wind.</p> <p>The roots tend to merge into a short, conical shaped rootstock with an erect rhizome. They develop for several years before a flowering stem is sent up. Slender, underground, horizontal branches terminate in buds which produce fresh plants where they take root. Only one stem arises from the root, which attains a height of three or four feet. The root crown often shows above ground at the stem base. Old roots become hollow and pithy.</p> <p>The mature root is dark yellowish-brown externally and whitish within. Slender and brittle rootlets of the same color are numerous. The odor of the fresh root is pleasantly aromatic, but the smell becomes strong and less agreeable as it dries. The taste is sweet at first and then bitter.</p> <p>The smell of the growing valerian plant is highly attractive to cats, rats and dogs. If the leaves or roots are bruised, some cats may roll around the plant and tear it to pieces. Valerian was once planted in outer borders to lure rats away from homes and buildings.</p>
<i>Growing Valerian</i>	<p>Valerian prefers full sun to partial shade, and fertile, moist garden soil. Valerian self-sows and spreads by root runners once it is established.</p>
<i>Planting</i>	<p>In April, sow seeds shallowly outdoors or transplant to a garden once small plants are established. Seeds germinate</p>

poorly. It is easier to plant roots (in the spring or fall) in a pot or directly in the garden with the crown at the surface of the soil. Space new plants one foot apart. Valerian quickly becomes crowded, so dig and renew the plants every three years.

The roots of valerian attract earthworms, so they are helpful in the garden for soil aeration. Because of its height, valerian is best suited to the back of the herb garden.

Harvesting

When growing valerian to harvest as an herb, the top branches are generally cut off in the spring to retain strength in the root throughout the growing season and to keep it from dissipating when flowering. The root should be collected in spring, before the stem begins to shoot upwards, or in the autumn, when the leaves decay.

The roots and rhizomes should be dug carefully (the numerous brittle rootlets are spread out) and cleaned. The odor of fresh roots is rather faint until they begin to dry.

Drying and Storage

Care should be taken to preserve the volatile oils. Dry quickly at 120° F until brittle. Pack tightly and keep in a dry environment to prevent deterioration. Valerian roots store well.