

herbs at a glance

Valerian



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This fact sheet provides basic information about valerian—common names, what the science says, potential side effects and cautions, and resources for more information.

Common Names—valerian, all-heal, garden heliotrope

Latin Name—*Valeriana officinalis*

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. Today, valerian is used as a traditional remedy for sleep disorders and anxiety, as well as headaches, depression, irregular heartbeat, and trembling.

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 other conditions, such as anxiety or depression.
- 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. NCCAM-funded researchers are also studying the potential of valerian and other herbal products to relieve menopausal symptoms.

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 tiredness the morning after its use, headaches, dizziness, and upset stomach.

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- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about complementary and alternative medicine, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

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For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

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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/870.html

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