

The Longwood Herbal Task Force
(<http://www.mcp.edu/herbal.default.htm>) and
The Center for Holistic Pediatric Education and Research
(<http://www.childrenshospital.org/holistic/>)

Patient Fact Sheet

VALERIAN

VALERIAN is a flowering plant that grows in Europe and North America. Its Latin name is *Valeriana officinalis*. Valerian root has been used as medicine since ancient times. It has a very bad smell, something like old gym socks. It is available in capsules and tablets, alcohol tinctures, and teas.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

- ◆ Valerian is mostly used for insomnia and other sleep problems. It is often combined with other herbs, such as hops, lemon balm and passion flower.
- ◆ It is also used for anxiety and nervousness.
- ◆ It is sometimes recommended for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

WHAT HAVE STUDIES SHOWN?

- ◆ Valerian helps many people who have **insomnia** or other **sleep problems** to fall asleep and sleep more soundly. When a regular dose is used, it does not cause a “hangover” the next morning.
- ◆ It helps many people with **anxiety**. It works as well as mild anti-anxiety medications.
- ◆ There are no studies of valerian’s use for **ADHD**.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?

- ◆ Allergic reactions, including itching and hives, are possible but rare.
- ◆ Other side effects may include upset stomach and headache.
- ◆ Valerian may cause sleepiness, so it should not be taken before driving or using dangerous equipment.
- ◆ People who take more than five grams of valerian root daily and then stop suddenly may have withdrawal symptoms.

WILL IT INTERFERE WITH MY OTHER MEDICATIONS OR MY MEDICAL CONDITION?

- ◆ Valerian may dangerously increase the effects of barbiturates, anti-anxiety medications, or alcohol.

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- ◆ Tinctures are not recommended for children, alcoholics, or people with severe liver disease because they contain alcohol.

IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN?

There are no studies of valerian's safety for children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. There have not been any reports of problems.

WHAT ARE TYPICAL DOSAGES?

A wide range of doses has been recommended. Some typical dosages for adults are:

Tea: 2 to 5 grams (1/2 to 1 teaspoon) of dried root, or one tea bag, steeped for 10 to 15 minutes in 5 ounces of hot water, then strained. One cup twice per day and before bed, by mouth.

Tincture: 1 to 3 mL (1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon) one to three times daily by mouth.

Pills or capsules of valerian extract (from three to six times more concentrated than dried valerian root):

- ◆ For sleep problems: 400 mg of valerian extract by mouth, one or two hours before bed.
- ◆ For anxiety: 200 to 400 mg of valerian extract up to three times daily.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Always tell your doctor or nurse practitioner if you are taking any herb, and before starting any new one. Your health care provider needs to know everything you are taking in order to help you make decisions about your health care. Some herbs can cause problems with other herbs, dietary supplements, or medications.

SEE ALSO:

Complete Monograph: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/valerian/valerian.pdf>

Clinician Information Summary: <http://www.mcp.edu/herbal/valerian/valerian.cis.pdf>