

Ashwagandha Alternative Medicine Uses

The Herbal Benefits of Ashwagandha Aka Winter Cherry

By: R. Renee Bembry

Ashwagandha is an herb that possesses a vast assortment of herbal benefits obtained primarily from its leaves and roots. Ashwagandha users believe the herbal benefits improve their physical as well as their emotional and mental well-being. They are not alone. Studies indicate the herb has the ability to treat conditions from stress and anxiety to mental disorders and even impotence.

The Ashwagandha plant is a member of the Nightshade family. Its botanical name is *Withania Somnifera* however many refer to it as the winter cherry or Indian Ginseng. A consolidated report examining many of the studies performed on the herb, and released by the Alternative Medicine Review, support claims of its beneficial uses.

The Alternative Medicine Review is a leading peer-reviewed journal wherein experts share information on alternative as well as complementary medical treatments. A compilation of studies discussed in one of their findings clearly indicates several benefits to persons using ashwagandha herbal treatments.

In addition to having a positive effect on endorphins, the feel good hormone naturally produced in the brain, ashwagandha benefits include anti-stress factors, anti-inflammatory properties, anti-tumor benefits, as well as antioxidant benefits. The Alternative Medicine Review states that the herb

possesses immunological, hematopoietic, and rejuvenating properties and has a positive effect on the central nervous system as well as the cardiopulmonary organs (heart and lungs).

Examining its benefits, one can only understand why practitioners in India have been using ashwagandha herbs, along with other herbs, oils, and purgatives in a system called Ayurvedic medicine for centuries. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), Ayurvedic is "one of the world's oldest medical systems". In furtherance, Oregon's Wild Harvest, a grower and distributor of the plant, states that ashwagandha is one of the leading herbs used in Ayurvedic medicine.

Examining ashwagandha benefits in more detail can help first time as well as experienced users better understand how they, individually, could get the most favorable results from this multi-use herb.

Ways in which ashwagandha can benefit users:

Stress

Studies conducted on dogs and frogs showed that using ashwagandha for stress could be effective for persons undergoing intense pressure. Tests conducted on these animals demonstrated ashwagandha's potential tranquilizing properties. Via examining ashwagandha's effects more specifically on the subjects' cardiovascular and respiratory systems, the studies indicate that patients seeking alternative medicines to treat relaxation problems could benefit from using ashwagandha for stress.

Anxiety

Persons seeking herbal aid for anxiety could also benefit from ashwagandha usage. Ashwagandha treatments for anxiety make perfect sense considering the herb possesses tranquilizing

agents. This means that in addition to benefiting those seeking herbal treatments for stress, ashwagandha could benefit those seeking herbal treatments for anxiety. Using ashwagandha herbs for anxiety allows these sufferers to take advantage of its calming properties.

Impotence

Men seeking assistance with sexual performance problems could reach for ashwagandha herbs for impotence support. Approximately 70 out of 101 men reported increased libido after participating in a yearlong study using ashwagandha herbs. The men, ages 50 to 59 experienced increased red blood cell counts and higher hemoglobin levels. The fact that blood and the ability to maintain erections go hand in hand suggests that using herbs for impotence, in this case ashwagandha, could benefit male sexual health.

Endurance

When given to rats prior to immersing them in water for a physical stress test, the animals were able to swim for longer periods in water temperatures of 50 degrees Fahrenheit. A similar test conducted using mice also produced favorable results. According to the Alternative Medicine Review, like results reproduced in humans would justify using ashwagandha to treat stress related nervous exhaustion.

Rejuvenation

Ashwagandha could help in situations wherein individuals have conditions for which they need help in gaining body weight, increased hemoglobin levels, higher iron levels, and improved strength. The alternative medicine review also points out that ashwagandha may be helpful as a human growth agent for undersized children.

Mental Disorders/Antioxidants

Tests showing that ashwagandha increases antioxidant related enzymes in the brain demonstrates how the herb may possess such a widespread assortment of uses including the ability to address mental disorders. Using herbs for mental disorders has been included in Ayurvedic medicine practice for many years. The review studies suggest that Ayurvedic medicinal use of ashwagandha to decrease instances of diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, schizophrenia, and epilepsy have been successful because of the herb's antioxidant properties. This means that using herbs for mental disorders could benefit patients seeking nontraditional forms of medical treatments.

Memory Improvement

Data collected from tests conducted on male Wistar rats showed that extracts from ashwagandha roots could benefit the cortical and basal forebrain. The data suggests the effect the extract has on the brain during these tests might help explain ashwagandha's impact on memory and cognition improvements when used by humans and lower animals.

Arthritis/Rheumatoid Arthritis

Tests conducted on rats suggest ashwagandha may possess soothing properties and reduce inflammation. By reducing inflammation, persons suffering from arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis could find relief from ashwagandha herbs since inflammation contributes to these conditions. In addition, ashwagandha could prove even more useful for persons suffering from rheumatoid arthritis because testing also shows the herb to promote reductions in regenerative changes. Tests conducted on human subjects also showed reductions in pain brought on by arthritis.

Ashwagandha herb distribution comes in many forms including teas, spices, tonics, oils, extracts, and capsules. Packaging ashwagandha in these fashions is a great way to dispense it around the world so that increased numbers of people seeking

alternative medicinal treatments can take advantage of this herb's wondrous ability to relieve so many ailments and to work as a preventative drug as well.