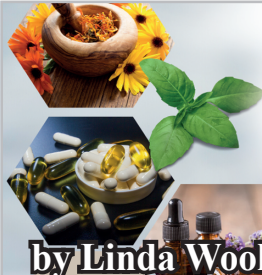


THE NATURAL PATH

*Your Guide to Good Health & Vitality
Cutting Edge Research Made Easy*

by **Linda Woolven, B.A., Master Herbalist, Acupuncturist** and **Ted Snider, B.Ed., M.A.**



Valerian: A Herbal Lullaby



THERE ARE MANY HERBS THAT HELP REMEDY INSOMNIA, BUT OF ALL THE HERBS, PERHAPS THE BEST AND BEST STUDIED IS VALERIAN

The Early Research

Valerian is the herbal superstar for insomnia. Several studies prove that valerian safely helps you fall asleep faster and enjoy a better sleep (*Pharmacopsychiatry* 2000;33:47-53). Double-blind research shows that valerian improves sleep in 89% of people and that 44% of them report perfect sleep (*Pharmacol Biochem Behav* 1989;32:1065-6).

A review of controlled studies of insomniacs found that 9 out of 12 studies of valerian demonstrated improvement in at least one measure of sleep. According to the authors, there were severe design flaws in the 3 studies that didn't find a benefit (*Aust Fam Physician* 2010;39:433-437).

One advantage of valerian over drugs is that valerian doesn't cause the morning hangover that is so common with pharmaceutical sleeping pills (*Pharmacol Biochem Behav* 1982;17:65-71).

Valerian Versus Drugs

How good is valerian? Valerian is better than the best drugs for insomnia. In one double-blind study, 600mg of valerian extract equalled the benzodiazepine oxazepam while being safer (*Forsch KomplementärmedKlass Naturheilkd* 2000;7:79-84). In another it

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Making Melatonin: Naturally!



WHETHER YOU BUY IT OR MAKE YOUR OWN, MELATONIN WORKS GREAT FOR INSOMNIA. WAIT, MAKE YOUR OWN?

Your circadian rhythm is crucial for sleep. Melatonin is a hormone secreted by your pineal gland during darkness that encourages sleep because it regulates your circadian rhythm and your sleep-wake cycle.

So, one great way to manufacture melatonin is to eliminate light sources at night. Piles of research shows that melatonin is an effective sleep aid. Recent research is suggesting that, in some conditions, melatonin may work even better than drugs.

Melatonin helps people fall asleep and have a better quality sleep. It works best in elderly insomniacs with low levels of melatonin. In any group, melatonin only helps when melatonin levels are low (*Z Gerontol Geriatr* 2001;34:491-497).

Melatonin for Young, Healthy People

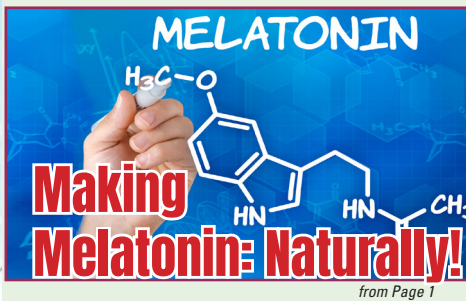
But a controlled study found that melatonin helps young adults who are not suffering from insomnia fall asleep faster with no hangover effect (*Clin Pharmacol Ther* 1995;57:552-8). And kids with chronic insomnia fall asleep faster when they're given 5mg of melatonin at 7 PM for a month (*J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 2003;42(11):1286-93). A double-blind study of healthy males found that melatonin helps you fall asleep significantly faster and sleep significantly longer (*Proc Natl Acad Sci U.S.A.* 1994;91:1824-1828). When people between 18 and 80 were given melatonin in a double-blind study, melatonin reduced the average time to fall asleep

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Lifesaver: Omega-3 EFA's Effective for Migraine

A new meta-analysis of 6 controlled studies of 407 people with chronic migraines found that omega-3 essential fatty acids significantly reduce headache frequency, duration and intensity as well as scores of impact of headaches on daily life (*Nutr Rev.* 2025 Sep 1;83(9):1621-1630).





by 15.4 minutes compared to 5.5 minutes in the placebo group in people over 55. Other measures of sleep quality improved significantly in all ages (*Curr Med Res Opin* 2011;27:87-98).

Melatonin When You're Getting Older

Research has shown that melatonin improves sleep in the elderly (*D* 1996;44:51; *J Clin Endocrinol Metab* 2001;86:4727-30). A double-blind study of 334 people found that taking 2mg of melatonin 2 hours before bed for 3 weeks improves sleep quality and morning alertness significantly better than a placebo. The improvement in time to fall asleep was significant (24.3 minutes versus 12.9 on placebo) and equal to the most commonly used sleeping medications. Melatonin also significantly improved quality of life (*Curr Med Res Opin* 2007;23:2597-605). Compared to placebo, a recent study of healthy people over the age of 55 found that 5mg of melatonin taken half an hour before going to bed significantly increased sleep efficiency (*J Pineal Res.* 2022 Aug;73(1):e12801).

Putting the Research Together

In a review of 6 double-blind studies, 4 found that melatonin caused people to fall asleep significantly faster, and 3 others found improvement in other measures of sleep quality (*Z Gerontol Geriatr* 2001;34:491-7).

A meta-analysis that put together 7 controlled studies of 205 people has confirmed that melatonin helps you fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer (*Front Neuroendocrinol* 2018. pii: S0091-3022(18)30014-1).

Is Melatonin Better than Drugs?

About 36% of people who are hospitalized experience insomnia even when they have no prior history of insomnia. It can be caused by patient care interventions, noise and medications. An interesting new study looked at 158 hospitalized non-ICU patients who were experiencing insomnia in the hospital even though they did not have a history of insomnia. They were treated either with the drug trazadone or with melatonin. The most common dose of melatonin was 6mg at bedtime. The second most common dose was 3mg.

There was no statistical difference

between trazadone and melatonin, perhaps because of the small sample size. But the surprising finding was that, while 34.6% of the trazadone group required an additional sleeping aid to be prescribed, only 19.7% of the melatonin group did. This study suggests that melatonin "may have a more favorable treatment outcome than trazadone" (*Hosp Pharm.* 2023 Apr;58(2):165-170).

Making Melatonin Yourself

There are a number of intriguing ways you can make your own melatonin. The most foundational is eliminating light sources when you go to bed, including no night lights, pulling down the blinds and turning off the screens. Meditation might also help elevate levels of melatonin (*Biol Psychol.* 2000 May;53(1):69-78).

Cherries

Cherries, it turns out, are rich in melatonin. Maybe that's why all four studies conducted on cherries and sleep found that they help (*Nutrients* 2018;10(3):368).

Compared to a placebo, a cherry product improved sleep efficiency, time taken to fall asleep, number of awakenings and total sleep time in one study (*J Nutr Health Aging* 2013;17:553-60).

Excitingly, another study found out why. Tart cherry juice given for 7 days in a double-blind study significantly increased melatonin. Compared to a placebo, the cherry group significantly increased the time spent in bed, had a significant 34 minutes more sleep per night and a significant 5-6% increase in the time in bed spent sleeping (*Eur J Nutr* 2012;51:909-16).

Lavender

We've known for a long time that lavender essential oil helps you sleep. We've even known for a long time that inhaling lavender essential oil helps you sleep as well as drugs



(*Lancet* 1995;346:701; *J Altern Complement Med* 2005;11:631-7).

Here's what we didn't know until recently. Lavender increases melatonin. A study of 67 people over the age of 60 found that lavender

essential oil increases melatonin. Each person used 5 drops in water for 30 minutes twice a week for 4 weeks. Melatonin levels went up significantly in both men and women (*Complement Ther Med* December 2019.47:102208).

Saffron

In the past few years, saffron has emerged as a leading herb for insomnia. Study after study confirms that it works. But a recent study adds a new reason why.

In a 4 week, double-blind study of 120 adults with insomnia, saffron, as expected, improved insomnia, sleep quality and mood after waking up. What was not expected was that the saffron also increased evening levels of melatonin (*Sleep Medicine* Oct 2021;86:7-18).

Lemon Verbena

The most recent herb that has demonstrated the ability to raise levels of melatonin is lemon verbena.

A new double-blind study gave either a placebo or 400mg of lemon verbena extract, standardized for 24% verbascoside and 28% total phenylpropanoids, to 71 people with sleep problems. The study lasted for 90 days.

The people in the lemon verbena group self reported significantly better improvement in their quality of sleep than the placebo group. And those subjective ratings were verified by objective ones. According to the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, there was significantly greater improvement in the herb group for overall score, time to fall asleep and sleep efficiency. And, according to actigraphy, which measure movement during sleep, lemon verbena led to significantly greater improvement in time to fall asleep and wakefulness and number of times waking up after falling asleep.

As a bonus, there was significantly greater improvement in anxiety in the lemon verbena group.

Unexpectedly, lemon verbena significantly increased levels of melatonin (*Nutrients.* 2024 May;16(10):1523).

Tomatoes

A more unusual study found that tomatoes contain melatonin and that beefsteak tomatoes contain the most. Overweight postmenopausal women who ate 250 g of beefsteak tomatoes 2 hours before bed for 8 weeks had significantly higher levels of melatonin and significantly improved scores on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (*Clin Nutr.* 2020 Jan;39(1):291-297).

So, from lights out to supplementing melatonin to making your own with herbs and tomatoes, there are lots of safe ways to increase melatonin and have a great night's sleep.

Spotlight: Horsetail Versus Drugs for High Blood Pressure

The Herbal Tradition

Horsetail is best known for its high silica content, making it valuable for hair, skin and nails.

Curiously, horsetail is also famous in traditional herbalism for acting as both a diuretic and astringent.



As an astringent, it is a great herb for incontinence, including for children who wet their beds. But it can also act as a diuretic. And it is this use that was featured in

a new study of high blood pressure.

The New Science

Diuretics are a first-line treatment for high blood pressure. Previous research has shown that the herb horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) has a comparable diuretic effect to the drug hydrochlorothiazide (*Evidence-*



Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine. 2014;760683).

This double-blind study compared

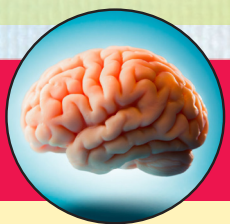
horsetail to hydrochlorothiazide in 68 people with high blood pressure (stage 1 systemic arterial hypertension). Half were given 25mg a day of hydrochlorothiazide; half were given 900mg a day of a standardized dry extract of horsetail. The study lasted for 3 months.

The horsetail significantly reduced systolic blood pressure by 12.6 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure by 8.1 mmHg. The effect was statistically as effective as the drug.

This is the first study to show that horsetail reduces blood pressure as effectively as hydrochlorothiazide and does so safely (*Phytomed*. May 2022;99:153955).



NATURAL PATH NEWSFLASH



Saffron for Diabetes & Cardiovascular Disease

With its constellation of any 3 of abdominal obesity, elevated triglycerides, low HDL-cholesterol, high blood pressure and elevated blood sugar, metabolic syndrome now affects 25% of all adults in the world. It can lead to diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

A new meta-analysis of 25 studies of 1486 people with metabolic syndrome, diabetes, high blood pressure, NAFLD or obesity found that saffron significantly improves fasting blood glucose, HbA1c, triglycerides, total cholesterol, systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

Phytother Res. May 2025;39(5):1883-1904.

Even Better Than Ginkgo?

Though it has not received the attention it deserves, bacopa is a well studied and remarkable herb for cognition and memory.

A new meta-analysis of 29 controlled studies has suggested that it may even be better than ginkgo.

The meta-analysis suggests that at 600mg a day, bacopa is significantly better than placebo and ginkgo for working memory and short-term memory.

They seemed to be equally effective for sustained attention, selective attention and processing speed.

Phytomed. April 2026;153:157915.

Ageless!



A Multivitamin Holds Back the Hands of Time

In this new study of 958 people, two years of taking a multivitamin-mineral supplement significantly slowed biological aging.

Over the two year study, the multivitamin-mineral resulted in about 4 months less biological aging.

Nature Medicine. 2026;32:1012-1022.

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beat it: while both treatments significantly improved sleep quality, the valerian was safer, and 82.2% of people with insomnia felt they had very good results with valerian while only 73.4% did with oxazepam (Eur J Med Res 2002;7:480-86).

Combining Valerian with Other Sleep Herbs

Valerian combines really well with other relaxing herbs. One great herbal partner is hops. This potent combination will help you to fall asleep significantly faster, to wake up in the night less often and to feel more refreshed in the morning (Eur J Med Res 2000;18:385-390). The valerian/hops combination has not only proven itself against a placebo (Phytother Res 2007;21:847- 51): it is as effective as benzodiazepines without leading to their withdrawal symptoms (Wien Med Wochenschr 1998;148:291-298). Other studies have also shown the benefit of this herbal combo (Somnologie 1998;2:26-31).

Valerian and hops can also be combined with passionflower. A double-blind study compared the three herb combo to the drug zolpidem in 78 adults with insomnia. The herbal dose was 300mg valerian extract standardized to .8% valerenic acid, 80 mg passionflower extract standardized to 4% isovitexin and 30 mg hops extract standardized to 0.35% rutin. Each person took one dose at bedtime. In both groups, time to fall asleep improved significantly and comparably. The two treatments both also significantly and comparably improved the amount of time they slept: the drug group improved from 3.5 to 5.7 hours, and the herb group had a slightly better improvement from 3.4 to 5.9 hours. The two treatments were also equally effective for significantly improving night time awakenings and quality of life (Indian J Pharmacol 2013;45(1):34-39).

Another good herb to combine with valerian is lemon balm. Double-blind studies prove that this combination works (Psychopharmacotherapy 1996;3:123-30; Fitoterapia 1999;70:221-228). It works as well as the drug Halcion without the daytime drowsiness and trouble concentrating that the drug causes (Thrapiewoche 1992;42:726-36).

Cutting Edge Research

Recently, several important studies have added to the evidence for valerian.

When 72 people with sleep problems took either a placebo or 200mg of valerian extract with 2% valerenic acid for 8 weeks

in a double-blind study, total scores on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index improved significantly versus placebo. Valerian significantly improved sleep time and time to fall asleep compared to placebo as well as daytime drowsiness and waking up feeling refreshed. As a bonus, valerian also significantly improve anxiety (Adv Ther. 2024; 41(1): 246–261).

The most recent research is establishing that valerian works well and that it works fast.

One double-blind study gave 72 young adults with mild insomnia either 200mg



of valerian extract standardized for 2% valerenic acid or a placebo one hour before bedtime for 8 weeks. The valerian worked like a dream. Compared to placebo, the valerian significantly improved total scores on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index as well as time taken to fall asleep, sleep time and sleep efficiency. People in the valerian group also had less daytime drowsiness and woke up feeling more refreshed. Not surprisingly, if you've ever tried valerian, there was also a significant improvement in anxiety. And the valerian did all of this safely (Adv Ther. 2023 Oct 30;41(1):246–261).

It is not surprising that valerian works well. But it is surprising how fast it is working in recent research. A reanalysis of the study has added an exciting new detail. The valerian not only worked well, it worked fast. Taking valerian helped on the very first night. The new analysis found that on the very first night taking the valerian, actual sleep time improved significantly from 306.09 minutes to 328.93 minutes. In the placebo group, it went from 339.8 minutes to a significantly worse 300.53. The difference represents a significant advantage for the valerian (Adv Complement Alt Med 2024;doi:10.31031/ACAM.2024.08.000688.)

The two studies demonstrate that valerian works very well and very safely both after a single dose and in the long run: a significant development in both valerian and sleep research.

Tough Cases & Special Research

Valerian is also up for the toughest of challenges. Poor sleep quality is a very common side effect for people who have had coronary artery bypass graft surgery. It is so common that a systematic review placed the number of people affected at over 50% (J Nurs Res 2011;19:275–289).

But when 72 people who had undergone coronary artery bypass graft surgery were given either a placebo or 530mg of valerian root extract for 30 nights after surgery in a triple-blind study, the people who were lucky enough to be in the valerian group did significantly better than the people in the placebo group in the quality of their sleep, how fast they fell asleep, how long they stayed asleep and how well they stayed asleep (Chin J Integr Med 2021 Jan;27(1):7-15).

People on hemodialysis also suffer poor sleep quality. But in a double-blind study that gave 39 people undergoing hemodialysis either a placebo or valerian root one hour before bed for a month, the valerian was significantly better than placebo for everything measured: sleep quality, depression and anxiety (Oman Med J. March 2021;36(2):e255).

Valerian also helps women suffering from the insomnia brought on by menopause (Menopause 2011;18:951-5; Complement Ther Clin Pract 2013;19:193-6; J Gorgan Univ Med Sci 2012;14:39–45). By the way, it also helps the menopause, significantly improving the frequency and severity of hot flashes (Women Health 2018;58(3):297-304; Iran J Pharm Res 2013;12(1):217-222).

A recent study gave 76 postmenopausal women either a placebo or a combination of valerian and fennel. The women in the valerian-fennel group had significantly fewer and less severe hot flashes and significantly better scores on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (J Menopausal Med. 2023 Apr;29(1):21-28).

About Linda Woolven & Ted Snider



The Natural Path is written by Ted Snider & Linda Woolven, a master herbalist, registered acupuncturist, reiki practitioner and solution-focused counselor with a practice in Toronto. For in person or virtual appointments, call 416.782.8211.

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