

PLANET HEALTH NEWSLETTER

5A CLARKSON RD. ELLISVILLE, MO 63011
636.527.8888



ASHWAGANDHA: AN HERB FOR THE TIME

Ashwagandha seems to specialize in anxiety, stress and sleepless nights. A systematic review of five controlled studies found that ashwagandha significantly improves anxiety. Ashwagandha can also help with stress eating and weight gain.

A 10-week double-blind study gave people struggling with both anxiety and insomnia 300 mg of ashwagandha root extract or a placebo twice a day. The people taking ashwagandha fell asleep significantly faster and woke up significantly less often during the night. Quality of sleep improved significantly more on ashwagandha: 3.92 points versus 1.67 with placebo.

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Overall, sleep scores improved by 68 percent on ashwagandha versus 11 percent on placebo. More people on ashwagandha were alert when they woke up. As for anxiety, scores on the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale improved significantly on ashwagandha. The placebo group improved from a score of 23.42 to 21.52; the ashwagandha improved from 23.58 to 18.48.

A second study duplicated the insomnia-anxiety results. Ashwagandha beat placebo on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. People fall asleep significantly faster and have significantly better quality of sleep. They had significantly greater total sleep time and woke up significantly less often once they had fallen asleep. Again, they had significantly better mental alertness. And again, those who took ashwagandha to help with insomnia also received help for anxiety: scores on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale improved significantly.

Ashwagandha safely helps the elderly. People between 65 and 80 were given a placebo of 600 mg a day of ashwagandha root extract for 12 weeks in a double-blind study. The ashwagandha group had significantly greater improvement in sleep, quality of sleep and mental alertness. On the World Health Organization Quality of Life questionnaire, scores improved significantly from 140.53 to 161.84. The ashwagandha group had significantly greater improvement on total, physical and psychological domains.

More Mental Health

This double-blind study gave 59 schizophrenics a placebo of 500 mg a day of ashwagandha extract for a week and then 1 g for another 11 weeks. The people in the study had recently experienced an exacerbation in their symptoms. The ashwagandha group had significantly greater improvement in symptom severity scores. They improved significantly more in perceived stress. Also, 27.3 percent of the placebo group had to up their dose of drug or add a second drug. Only .1 percent of the ashwagandha group did.

Since ashwagandha is effective for stress and anxiety, researchers tried adding 120 mg of ashwagandha root extract or placebo to SSRI antidepressants four times a day for six weeks in people with OCD. While scores on the Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale went down from 18 to 16 in the placebo group, they went from 26 to 14 in the herb group: a significantly better improvement.

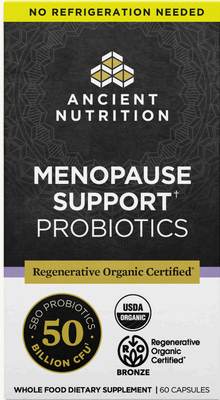
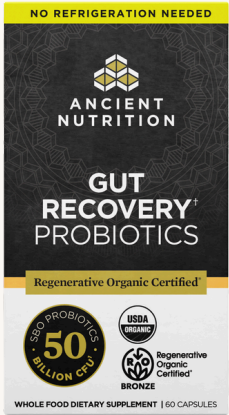
And when seniors with mild cognitive impairment take 600 mg of ashwagandha, their memory, executive function, attention and information processing speed improve significantly.

Strength

Ashwagandha promotes muscle mass and significantly improves muscle strength and exercise tolerance while decreasing body fat and increasing lean body weight.

When men were given placebo or 300 mg of ashwagandha root extract twice a day in a double-blind study while they followed a resistance training program, upper body strength improved significantly more in the ashwagandha group. The placebo group increased the amount they bench pressed by 26.4 kg; the ashwagandha group increased theirs by 46 kg. The same results were obtained for lower body strength. The placebo group increased their leg extensions by 9.8 kg compared to a 14.5 kg increase in the ashwagandha group. The ashwagandha group built bigger muscles too. Arm muscles were 5.3 cm larger in the placebo group but 8.6 cm larger in the ashwagandha group. Chest muscles were 1.4 cm larger in the placebo group but 3.3 cm larger on ashwagandha. Ashwagandha also improved muscle recovery time better than placebo and significantly reduced muscle damage. It also produced significantly greater loss of body fat percentage. Testosterone levels increased significantly more in the ashwagandha group.

In a second study, men were given a placebo of 500 mg of a standardized extract of ashwagandha leaf and root each morning for 12 weeks. They did a strength training program four days a week. Once again, the ashwagandha group had significantly greater strength improvement. Lower body strength increased by 18.2 percent on ashwagandha versus 9.7 percent on placebo. Upper body strength increased by 13.7 percent versus 8.2 percent. The ashwagandha group had superior recovery as well. Soreness increased 45 percent on placebo but only 18 percent on ashwagandha.



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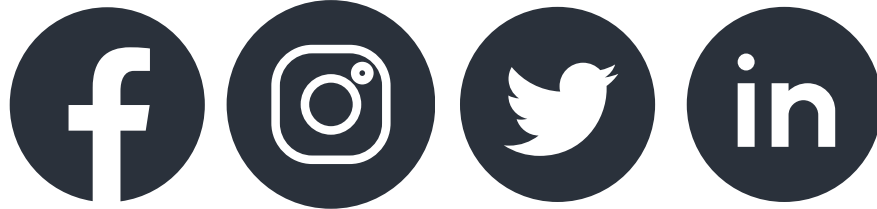


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