ASHWAGANDHA

Withania somnifera

A strengthening yet calming adaptogenic tonic that nourishes the nerves, whilst also building core energy

COMMON NAME: Winter cherry (E), Indian ginseng (E), Asgandh (H)          LATIN NAME: Withania somnifera

SANSKRIT: Ashwagandha          PART USED: Root          PLANT FAMILY: Solanaceae (nightshade)

Key points
1. As an adaptogen, it helps the body to cope with the increasing everyday demands of modern life and counters the effects of stress on the body
2. Calming and strengthening tonic for the nervous system, adrenals and immune system
3. Promotes restful and quality sleep, further promoting good health when demand upon the body is high

What conditions would you recommend it for?
• Anxiety, stress, fatigue, insomnia and related memory problems
• HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis) dysregulation, low adrenal and thyroid function
• Immune deficiency, chronic muscle pain, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome,
• Infertility and low libido (men and women)

Sourcing organic practitioner-grade ashwagandha
Ashwagandha belongs to the Solanaceae (nightshade) family. The roots are harvested and air-dried before being used in medicines. The most revealing family feature are its small red berries, similar to cherry tomatoes which explain its other common name ‘winter cherry’. All of Pukka’s ashwagandha is grown in a dry region of north Karnataka (South West India). Ashwagandha’s ability to help the body adapt to stress is reflected by its ability to thrive in arid conditions and poor-quality alkaline soils. Most plants would suffer from severe stress in such an environment.

How ashwagandha works
Ayurveda views ashwagandha as one of the most prized rejuvenating herbs, known as a ‘rasayana’ in Sanskrit. Rasayanas are thought to enhance both the quality and quantity of life, nourish the mind and enhance physical vigour, making them perfect for weak, debilitated or exhausted conditions. Ashwagandha is a viewed as a modern-day adaptogen, supporting our body’s resistance to physical and emotional stress by strengthening the endocrine and nervous systems. However, this herb is unusual in that it is also a tonic. This means it will strengthen an exhausted or agitated nervous system whilst at the same time calming it. It acts directly on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis modulating the release of stress hormones, such as cortisol, from the adrenal glands.1,2 Ashwagandha’s botanical name, Withania somnifera, gives us further clues as to its properties. The Latin word ‘somnifera’ is translated as ‘sleep-inducing’, reflecting ashwagandha’s ability to support deeper sleep.3

Ashwagandha by body system
• Musculoskeletal: Ashwagandha reduces muscle inflammation and strengthens muscle tone.4 Therefore, it may be effective for post-convalescent weakness and athletic exertion.
• Nervous: The restorative and regenerative effect this herb has on nerve cells makes it ideal for supporting chronic muscle pain, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. Specific for ‘hyper’ active conditions of the nervous system such as anxiety, stress-induced insomnia, nervous exhaustion and heart weakness. Research also supports its positive effects on memory and cognition.5
• Immune: As an adaptogen, ashwagandha is likely to support immunity. Preclinical studies show modulation of the immune response, indicating that ashwagandha may help support a weakened immune system.6
• Reproductive: Ashwagandha improves sperm motility, sperm count and erectile dysfunction.7,8 It also supports women achieving sexual arousal and orgasm, by decreasing the effects of stress on female sexual dysfunction and increasing testosterone (a factor in androgen deficiency syndrome which in turn is also associated with female sexual dysfunction).9
• Hormonal: Ashwagandha is helpful in supporting the endocrine system with particular focus on the thyroid glands.10

Research highlights
Ashwagandha has been found in multiple clinical trials to have benefits in stress and anxiety, as shown in a systematic review of the evidence.11 Treatment with ashwagandha improved serum TSH, T3 and T4 levels significantly in patients with subclinical hypothyroidism (thyroid
Constituents of ashwagandha
Ashwagandha contains alkaloids, saponins, polyacetylenes and iron but perhaps most interesting to us are steroidal lactones. Important medicinal constituents are a family referred to as withanolides and withaferins. Withanolides show adaptogenic, anti-inflammatory, anxiolytic, anti-depressant, hepatoprotective and anti-tumour activities.1-14

Ayurvedic Energetics

Temperature: Mildly warming

Doshic effect: Reduces vata and kapha. Caution in excess pitta as slightly warming

Energetic actions: Supportive, strengthening, nourishing

Recipe for Moon Milk

With the average lifestyle getting more and more hectic every year, it’s no wonder that so many people struggle to get a restful night’s sleep. This soothing, warming recipe is perfect just before bed, and can also help to nourish the nervous and reproductive systems. If you need something a little stronger, swap the Wholistic Ashwagandha for 2 capsules of Pukka Night Time.

Ingredients
2 capsules of Pukka Wholistic Ashwagandha
1 cup of milk of choice
2 tsp organic almond powder
5 seeds cardamom (small black seeds found inside the pod)
1 pinch nutmeg

Method: Slowly heat all the ingredients in a pan, adding a teaspoon of honey to taste, if desired.

Ashwagandha at home

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