

## Herbal Support for Anxiety

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When daily stress progresses beyond healthy stimulation and begins to adversely affect health, it can manifest as anxiety. Anxiety includes persistent mental and physical symptoms such as worry, agitation, tenseness, and hyperarousal of the nervous system causing increased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration. These symptoms are meant to be adaptive coping mechanisms for short term stress but, when stress is lasting, can be expressed too intensely or at inappropriate times. Panic attacks and insomnia can also be part of the picture.

There are numerous herbs that can support us during times of stress and reduce anxiety. Generally, these are nervine relaxants and anxiolytics, which support and relax the central nervous system, and adaptogens, which support endocrine function and help us respond appropriately to stress. For more acute anxiety or related insomnia, herbal sedatives can also be useful.

### Relaxing nervines/anxiolytics:

**Passionflower** (*Passiflora incarnata*): helpful in disturbed sleep from mental worry and exhaustion resulting from excitement or circular thinking ("monkey brain"); useful as tea or tincture

**Skullcap** (*Scutellaria lateriflora*): useful in nervous irritability, restlessness, and panic attacks, as well as muscular tension related to stress; good tea or tincture-use up to 1/2 oz as an acute dose in an emergency

**Milky Oat tops** (*Avena sativa*): for nervous exhaustion, frayed nerves, fatigue; to reinvigorate and nourish the nervous system; an excellent tonic tea or tincture

**Lemon Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*): quick-acting, gentle remedy; for sadness with mild anxiety or depression; lifts spirits, improves concentration; particularly useful for menopausal mood swings; delicious tea

**Motherwort** (*Leonurus cardiaca*, "lion hearted"): a nervine that can be used for heart palpitations associated with anxiety and excessive worry, especially associated with insomnia; also useful in menopause; best as tincture

**Chamomile** (*Matricaria recutita*): a lovely relaxing herb for children and adults alike, particularly when nothing seems to soothe; especially helpful when digestion suffers during high anxiety; makes excellent tea if steeped for a short time

### Adaptogens:

**Ashwagandha** (*Withania somnifera*): as the Latin name implies, this root supports sleep; excellent for depleted or convalescing people – especially the elderly; a calming adaptogenic tonic for exhaustion, anxiety, and depression; may reduce stress-induced ulcers; restores sexual vigor; also modulates immune function

**Reishi** (*Ganoderma lucidum*, *G. tsugae*): an adaptogen for reducing effects of chronic stress and supporting adrenal function; as a nervine it calms the spirit and supports sleep; also a potent immunomodulator

**Sedatives:** (to be avoided if depression is also present)

**Hops** (*Humulus lupulus*): useful for symptoms of restlessness, anxiety, and insomnia; eases tension, especially when digestion is effected; best as tincture due to taste

**Valerian** (*Valeriana officinalis*): specific for anxiety, depression, and some headaches; decreases the time taken to fall asleep and improves quality of sleep; best as tincture

**Kava** (*Piper methysticum*): for nervous anxiety, stress, and unrest, especially where social relationships are challenging; does not impair reaction time and appears to improve concentration; good as a capsule or tincture; traditional tea preparation can also be effective



Getting plenty of protein, C and B vitamins, antioxidant-rich fruits and veggies, and omega-3 fatty acids (as from fish oil) supports healthy brain function and stress response. Also try blending relaxing essential oils such as clary sage, ylang ylang, chamomile, lavender and/or rose into a massage or bath oil. Relaxation techniques, such as meditation and breathing exercises are also extremely helpful.

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