

Sleeping Poorly?

Advice to promote healthy sleep

by Alison Cullen



How to Use Herbal Remedies Safely

This guidebook is not intended to replace medical advice. You should consult a Healthcare Professional if you have any condition which is of concern. For safe, effective results when taking herbal remedies, follow the guidelines below.

If the product you have has an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the leaflet and product packaging.

If the product does not come with an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the product packaging. The following general advice also applies to products with no in-pack leaflet.

- If there is any doubt as to the nature of the problem please consult your Doctor for a diagnosis.
- Do not use when pregnant or breastfeeding unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not use for children under 2 years of age unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not exceed stated doses.
- Do not use alongside medication with the same action eg. a tranquilizing herb alongside tranquillizing medication.
- Do not take more than 3 herbal remedies concurrently.
- Stop taking herbal remedies 14 days before surgery.

Get Some Sleep

Sleep is designed to restore us to full function

after a period (usually a day) of wearing ourselves out. During the night, tissues are repaired, organs rest or finish cycles such as flushing out toxins, and the brain filters the events of the day. It's as if a crew of cleaning staff move in and sweep, dust, mop and repair the building, mending cracks that have shown up during the day, emptying the rubbish bins, filing information that's come in, and restoring the building to working order for the next day.

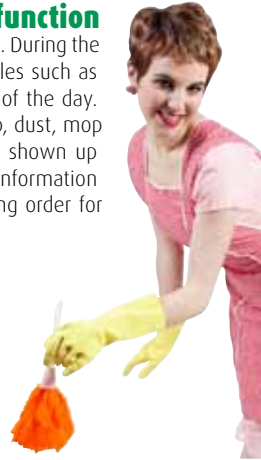
The problem comes when sleep is elusive.

Missing the time to repair and restore, we find our brains struggling to cope, memory slipping, concentration below par, muscles fatigued, skin dull and eyes lack-lustre.

The longer this goes on, the harder it becomes to function properly. Imagine what your home or office would look like if the bins weren't emptied for a week or more. Imagine the chaos if nothing was ever filed or tidied, if the cupboards weren't refilled with food, if the loos weren't flushed. Your body finds it harder and harder to work effectively if it doesn't have the time to replenish its stores, deal with its toxins, and filter the incoming information.

Parents with new babies know how divorced from reality they feel after a few weeks of severely interrupted sleep; and torturers from Roman times onwards have used sleep deprivation to unpick prisoners' brains.

So, a good solid few hours of sleep will do wonders for everything from your skin to your soul. Why does it sometimes elude you?



Slumber Solutions

You may be taking too much caffeine, which stimulates the nervous system and puts it on red alert. Great if you're running a race or chasing a deadline, but grim if you're trying to fall asleep. Even a couple of cups of tea or coffee in the morning may be enough to interrupt your sleep if you are sensitive or going through a stressful period. Remember that chocolate and fizzy drinks also contain caffeine, and swap to natural alternatives such as pure juices and dried fruit.



Your life may be so hectic that you don't have time to wind down before collapsing into bed. This prevents your nervous system from shifting into a pre-sleep pattern. Have a warm bath or read a pleasant book, but don't watch the nerve-wracking news or try to finish an essay just before bed.

You may be eating late at night, which means you'll be digesting when you should be sleeping. You may then wake at 3am as the liver finishes its tour of duty, or you may find your food lying like a stone in your stomach all night. Either way, you don't get the benefit of a refreshing sleep. Consider changing your mealtime, or eating more at lunchtime and a lighter meal at night.

More than 31 million people in the UK are suffering from tiredness caused by poor quality sleep. If you find sleep elusive or fail to find the sleep you get refreshing, you are not alone – as many as 7 out of 10 people in the UK are experiencing the same problems. *(Figures taken from 'Making Time for Sleep' by Dr Neil Stanley.)*



You may have your bedroom packed with non-sleep related items such as televisions, computers or stacks of work. This makes it difficult for the brain to switch off and understand that it is supposed to be sleeping, not working. Reserve your bed for sleep, rather than watching television or working. Then your body will not associate being in bed with being alert and on edge.



You may be on a hamster wheel of wearily persistent thoughts and worries, so clear your mental agenda before you go to bed – make a list of things to do the next day or issues that you need to consider, and then put them aside for the night.

Another common aid to sleep is a herbal remedy. Many herbal preparations may be used to assist sound sleep, and one that has recently been tested in a successful clinical trial is a combination of valerian and hops.

Valerian Hops

This is a combination of fresh Valerian root and Hops. It was created by Alfred Vogel, Switzerland's best-known herbalist and naturopath. Alfred Vogel used a combination of valerian and hops fresh extracts to address the sleeping problems he saw in his patients.



Scientific evidence

A recent clinical trial investigating the effects of valerian and hops combination supports the traditional and long-standing use of these herbs as a remedy to aid sleep.

In this clinical trial, 44 patients experiencing difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, took part in an attempt to overcome their sleep problems. Their sleeping troubles were not due to other obvious issues such as back pain or depression, and they were otherwise healthy and had no physical or neurological problems.

The patients spent one acclimatisation night in a sleep laboratory where their sleep pattern was monitored. They were then divided into two randomly assigned groups, one of which was given a combination of Valerian and hops fresh extracts, and the other a placebo that tasted the same. Neither the patients nor their physicians knew whether they had been given the real herbs or placebo. Their second night was then monitored by the sleep laboratory staff to see how long they spent asleep and how deep their sleep was.

Patients who took the combination of valerian and hops had much better sleep cycles than those on placebo, with more time spent at a deeper level of sleep.

This trial shows that not only does the combination of valerian and hops work well to get you to sleep, but it also restores restful, replenishing sleep by improving your sleep cycles and the amount of time you spend deeply asleep.



What to do now

If you:

- **Can't get to sleep?**
- **Can't stay asleep?**
- **Wake up feeling drained despite spending hours asleep?**

It is worth trying a combination of valerian and hops extracts which you may find a simple solution to your slumber problems.

The combination of valerian and hops is not known to be habit forming and doesn't leave you feeling groggy when you wake up in the morning.

It's worth paying attention to the fact that in the trial, the valerian and hops combination worked the first time it was taken. This is significant because sleeping problems quickly enter a vicious circle whereby the anticipation of not sleeping becomes one of the reasons for poor sleep, as you lie there worrying about how little sleep you're getting and how hard it is to drop off.

With a few sensible life-style adjustments and the use of herbs traditionally known to aid sleep you can begin to reclaim your sweet dream time.

Who can't take it?

- Don't use the combination of valerian and hops if you are allergic to these herbs or are already taking medication for sleeplessness.
- Talk to your doctor if symptoms worsen or you do not feel any benefit within 4 weeks.
- Don't use valerian & hops combination if you are pregnant or breast feeding.
- Don't use a tincture of valerian & hops if you are taking another medicine that is affected by alcohol.



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