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Ashwagandha

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Have you ever heard of Ashwagandha? Could you explain what it is and what it does?

Ashwagandha withania (Latin name: *Withania somnifera*- Solanaceae): Sometimes it is called Ashwagandha and sometimes Withania; either way, it's the same herb. It is also known in English as Winter Cherry. It is from the SOLANACEAE family and commonly referred to as Indian Ginseng. The Solanaceae is one of the largest families of plants in the world, with more than 3,000 species. Some of the more common species in this family are: potato, eggplant, tomato, chili pepper, capsicum, and gooseberry. The name Solanaceae is derived from 'Solari,' which means soothing in Latin. Ashwagandha's main use is as a long-term rejuvenating treatment- referred to as Indian Ginseng.

Ashwagandha is a small, woody shrub that reaches a height of about 2 feet. It's found growing naturally as a perennial in Africa, the Mediterranean and India. But it can also be grown in this part of the world as an annual because the roots are harvested from the 1- year old plant. It is dried whole or in pieces directly in the sun. Except for its bright red fruit, it is described as a fairly plain and nondescript plant.

Ashwagandha has been extensively researched for the following conditions: arthritis, anxiety, headaches, high blood pressure, infertility, rheumatism, tiredness, and cardiac problems. It is a tonic, adaptogen, nervine, sedative, anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor and aphrodisiac. Some of its main chemical properties include alkaloids, withanolides and sitoindosides. The alkaloids have been studied since 1965 and are thought to be responsible for the plant's sedative properties, which lower blood pressure and regulate heartbeat. The withanolides act as precursors to the body's own steroid hormones. If there is an excess of a certain hormone, the plant based hormone precursors occupy the so-called hormone receptor sites, without converting to human hormones to block absorption. If there is a lack of a certain hormone, the plant based hormone precursors act to enhance the production of that particular hormone. In this way, Ashwagandha, like other adaptogenic tonic herbs is 'amphoteric' and serves to regulate important physiological processes, increasing or decreasing as needed. Withanolides are anti-inflammatory and together with the sitoindosides have also been found to inhibit the growth of cancer cells (in mice and in petri dishes). It is considered to be useful in chronic inflammatory diseases such as lupus and arthritis and as a cancer preventative.

As if this wasn't enough, Ashwagandha will also 'clarify' the mind, calm and strengthen the nerves and promote a sound and restful sleep' (Robert Svoboda, [Ayurveda, Life, Health and Longevity](#)). The unique properties of Ashwagandha, while being an energy tonic like Ginseng, are uniquely more beneficial for calming the mind and relieving the inflammation of arthritis. It is especially good as a major tonic to counteract the ravages of aging, such as senile dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. It is also used as a mild purgative for chronic constipation and for the treatment of swollen glands.

It is the most highly recommended herb in the ***Ayurvedic*** medical system (translated as Science of Health). The Ayurvedic system of medicine dates back to at least the same time period of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and perhaps before (over 3000 years). It is based on a system of 'Tridosha' or Three Humours, which classifies all individual constitutions of people, diseases, herbs and other non-herbal remedies and therapies according to whether they are Vata (air or nerve oriented), Kapha (water or mucoid type) or Pitta (fire type).

Because the flavor is sharp and pungent, this indicates that it is warming, raising metabolism, stimulating digestion, clearing mucus and improving circulation. Ayurvedic also identifies a secondary post-digestive flavor to this herb; sweet. It is this effect that has deep nutritive and hormonal properties as well as the ability to strengthen and nourish the entire nervous system. (Dr. Michael Tierra: [Ashwagandha; Wonder Herb of India](#))

I could learn to love this plant for all of its healing properties- it will help to prevent senile dementia, stop inflammation of arthritis, help keep us regular,

calm us down, give us clear thinking and energy. And oh yes, did I mention that it's also an aphrodisiac?