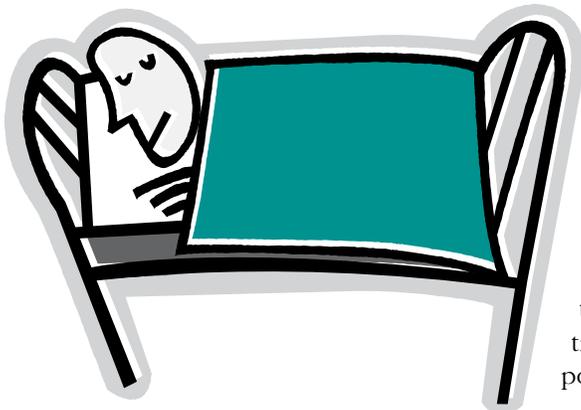


Valerian

Sleep on it!

by Margy Squires

Sleep. It seems the more we learn about this nocturnal habit, the less we get of it. In fact, according to the National Sleep Foundation, some **50 million Americans have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep.** Insomnia (Latin for “poor sleep”) may be intermittent from a few nights lost to chronic, lasting more than a month. Research shows that sleep is more than closing our eyes and resting. Our brain is busy storing memories, producing hormones that stimulate growth, repair and set appetite controls, and renewing immune defense and vitality.¹ **Poor sleep may mean next day fatigue, body pains, memory problems and lower immune function. Bottom line? You need to sleep!**



In other TyH Publications articles, we’ve covered the basics from setting up your bedroom to encourage z’s to helpful pre-slumber habits. Interestingly, many of you have learned that valerian helps reduce anxiety and pain but lest you forget, historically valerian is renowned as a good-for-sleep herb.

Specifically, it’s the chemical extracts from the root of the plant that are responsible for valerian’s actions.² Thus, supplements need to be standardized to contain the primary constituent valerenic acid at 0.8% content, although the milligram (mg) strength may vary. To simplify, I’ll use VRE to stand for the valerian root extract at the 0.8% potency.

VRE “works” gently, both as an analgesic and sedative on the central nervous system (CNS). Valerian aids sleep in three ways; 1) relaxing nervous tension and muscles, 2) increasing time spent in REM sleep and 3) reducing night time waking.³ By improving sleep quality, valerian helps you wake up more refreshed and typically without that groggy, can’t-get-out-of bed feeling.

Valerian also appears to team up with other sleep promoting agents. Herbs of the same family (“like” herbs) have a certain synergy together that each alone does not have. Lemon balm, passionflower and hops have relaxing properties that add to valerian’s, especially if standardized extracts are used. VRE’s activity may involve GABA receptors.⁴ GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) is a neurotransmitter found to enhance REM sleep and exhibits a calming effect on the CNS. Be aware when several “like” ingredients are combined, the effect may be more sedating than VRE alone and may not be appropriate for daytime use.



Studies on the efficacy of valerian for insomnia are mixed due to the VRE content not quantified, small populations studied and/or subjects had long-standing insomnia, a problem not resolved overnight. In multiple studies valerian’s effects improve with time – time needed to retrain your body and brain that the wee hours of the night are for sleeping. VRE also helps when sleep is evasive due to an organic reason.

For instance, VRE has been studied in rheumatoid arthritis patients. With no next day sedation, VRE offers a safe sleep aid in a population with known morning stiffness and difficulty in a.m. rising.⁵ A triple-blind study of 100 postmenopausal women concluded “valerian improves the quality of sleep in women with menopause who are experiencing insomnia”, with a “statistical significant change” in sleep quality over 4 weeks.⁶ Another triple-blind, 8-week study concluded “valerian may be an alternative treatment for the symptom management of restless leg syndrome, with positive health outcomes”. By decreasing daytime sleepiness through better

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Valerian *Sleep on it!*

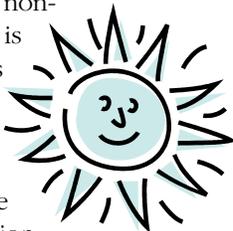
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sleep, VRE improved “quality of life”.⁷ Although VRE was not tested on its own for the unrestorative sleep of fibromyalgia, it was part of an effective protocol with other nutrients, such as Fibro-Care™.⁸



How effective is VRE? When compared to popular pharmaceutical sleep aid oxazepam, VRE “showed comparable efficacy” in 202 subjects of a double-blind study over the course of 6 weeks.⁹ Oxazepam is in the class of benzodiazepines (BDZ), known to cause rebound sleeplessness for several nights if discontinued. But when VRE was given after drug washout, subjects had increased sleep time and decreased wake time. They also reported “significantly better sleep”.¹⁰ The authors suggest “valerian had a positive effect on withdrawal from BDZ use.”

The safety of VRE is well researched. It is non-habit forming and next day alertness is not affected.¹¹ Although valerian exhibits only mild sedating properties, do not combine with prescribed antidepressants or medicines without medical supervision. VRE has been used in Europe for more than 100 years and the German Commission E Monograph recommends it for sleep, reporting no known side effects or contraindications.¹²



Valerian’s effect on the CNS may augment anesthesia necessary for certain procedures. Therefore, if you are considering any procedure involving anesthesia, advise your anesthesiologist of any valerian use as discontinuing 2 weeks prior to surgery is the standard recommendation.¹³

What’s the best way to take VRE? Follow the guidelines on the label. A typical dose will vary with the mg strength and in combination formulations. Always look for the 0.8% valerenic acid potency as the key to effectiveness. Depending on the strength, start with 1-2 tablets or capsules 20 minutes or so before bed, along with recommended pre-bedtime habits to help you relax and unwind. Pleasant dreams!

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- ◆ *Valerian, the not just for sleep herb*
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