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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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

Continued
Valerian Sleep on it!

continued

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.

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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