

Valerian: Ancient Herb May Help Sleep Disorders

(NAPSA)—It's an eye-opening concept: Many people who often have trouble falling asleep may soon rest easier, thanks to a simple herb that's been used successfully since the days of ancient Greece, scientists say.

Surprisingly, a plant called “phu” by first century Greek physicians—because of its strong and not so pleasant “fragrance”—may help individuals suffering from sleep disorders, new scientific evidence has shown. Called valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) root, it has been used as a sedative for at least 2,000 years. First documented by the “Father of Medicine,” Hippocrates, as well as the noted Greek physician Galen, who prescribed the medicine for insomnia, the herb is now used in some 60 sedative remedies in Germany alone.

Valerian's benefits are so well documented that the root of this odorous plant can be used as a sleep aid, as a mild sedative, and as a possible alternative to taking stronger synthetic sedatives, reports the World Health Organization. Here are some more interesting facts about valerian, from the experts at the American Botanical Council (ABC), a non-profit research and educational organization:

- Scientists who conducted a clinical trial in 2000 found that valerian, in combination with hops (*Humulus lupulus*), was a sensible alternative to benzodiazepine, a popular pharmaceutical drug used for sleep disorders. Participants who used the pharmaceutical drug reported withdrawal symptoms, unlike those who used valerian. A 1997 study found that valerian significantly improved sleep quality.

- Valerian and its medicinal properties are listed in authorized



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medical texts in France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia, Switzerland and Japan. Valerian is an approved and licensed herbal medicine by the German Commission E, a federally appointed scientific committee including physicians and pharmacists who review and approve botanical medicines. The Commission E's investigations reveal that using valerian products produces no known adverse side effects.

- Used extensively in the traditional ancient medical systems of India, China and Tibet, valerian is now widely used in the U.S. in sleep aids and sedatives. Some reports have found the herb may also relieve pain, reduce spasms and stimulate the appetite.

- Fortunately, valerian is now available in tablet or capsule form—so you don't have to experience what those early physicians might have called the herb's “phu factor.”

Consumers and health professionals can find more information about the clinically documented benefits of valerian from the American Botanical Council, a non-profit research and education organization at www.herbalgram.org. Photograph courtesy of Steven Foster, www.stevenfoster.com.