

Natural Health

July 2011

\* 40th Anniversary Special!

# The Best of Natural Health®

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yoga + water = **bliss**

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## Natural Healing

"Treating yourself with home remedies is the easiest, least invasive and sometimes the most effective treatment," says herbalist Rosemary Gladstar, founder of Sage Mountain Herb Center in Barre, Vt., and author of the classic *Herbal Healing for Women* (Simon & Schuster).

Here are six herbs to help ease six common symptoms:

**Symptom** >> **HOT FLASHES**

**Solution** >> **SAGE** (*Salvia officinalis*)

**How to use it:** Steep one tablespoon dried sage in one cup of hot water for 15 minutes or longer to make a tea; strain and cool. Drink up to three cups a day. If you don't like the taste, put the tea into a spray bottle (after it has cooled completely) and spritz it on your neck.

**Why it works:** "Sage has been passed down from generation to generation in Western herbal tradition as the surefire cure for hot flashes," explains Sheila Kingsbury, N.D., of Bastyr University in Kenmore, Wash. It's such an effective astringent that it has been approved in Germany as a treatment for excessive sweating for both women and men. "Sage was also used in Native American cultures to clear negative energy so it may help ease some of the irrational fears that can cycle through your head during perimenopause," says herbalist Margi Flint, author of *The Practicing Herbalist* (EarthSong Press).

**Symptom** >> **INSOMNIA**

**Solution** >> **VALERIAN** (*Valeriana officinalis*)

**How to use it:** Take two 500-milligram capsules one hour before bedtime as needed.

**Why it works:** Many studies have affirmed the safety and efficacy of valerian for treating garden-variety insomnia—a common problem during perimenopause. "It works in the same way that Valium or Xanax does, but the effect is much milder. There is no hangover afterward nor any risk of addiction," says Kingsbury. There's just one catch: "It's a reliable sedative for most people, but a small percentage will get jazzed up instead," she cautions.

**Contraindication:** Do not take valerian if you're taking any kind of prescription sleep aids.

**Symptom** >> **FATIGUE**

**Solution** >> **ASHWAGANDHA** (*Withania somnifera*)

**How to use it:** Take two 500-milligram capsules two times every day.

**Why it works:** In Ayurvedic tradition, ashwagandha is the great revitalizer, says Ayurvedic practitioner Will Foster of Knoxville, Tenn. "It's an adaptogen that helps balance out scattered energy, which means that when stress or hormonal changes leave you feeling drained, ashwagandha can help fill up your tank." The herb means "smell of horse," a nod to the strength and vitality of horses, says Foster. "Take ashwagandha when you need to boost your horsepower." It also may increase your sex drive.

**Symptom** >> **HEAVY PERIODS**

**Solution** >> **YARROW** (*Achillea millefolium*)

**How to use it:** Take two droppers of tincture every 30 minutes until bleeding slows.

**Why it works:** Yarrow is the go-to herb for menstrual bleeding, says Gladstar. "It slows excessive bleeding, relieves pelvic congestion, reduces cramping and flushes out the liver so estrogen and progesterone are processed more efficiently," she says.

**Symptom** >> **LACK OF CONCENTRATION; LOSS OF MEMORY**

**Solution** >> **WATER HYSSOP** (*Bacopa monnieri*)

**How to use it:** Take one 500-milligram capsule twice daily. Foster suggests starting off slowly—perhaps with a 100-milligram dose twice per day—and increasing the dosage in 100-milligram increments up to the recommended 1,000 milligrams a day. "If the herb makes you feel spacey, contact your Ayurvedic practitioner for specific guidance on dosing," he advises. "You might be taking too much too quickly."

**Why it works:** Used in Western European, Chinese and Indian herbal traditions, water hyssop is called *brahmi* in Sanskrit, which means "consciousness." It can help ease agitation if you feel particularly distracted before or during your period; it's also good for everyday focus. "*Bacopa monnieri* can sharpen concentration, memory and overall intelligence, and it also improves longevity," says Foster. "Its ability to boost mental performance [by enhancing nerve impulses between cells in the brain] has been documented in multiple studies in the United States and abroad."

**Symptom** >> **ANXIETY**

**Solution** >> **KAVA KAVA** (*Piper methysticum*)

**How to use it:** Take one dropperful of tincture in warm water as needed (not to exceed three doses a day). You can take it daily, but not for more than a consecutive three-month period.

**Why it works:** Kava kava is native to Polynesia and Melanesia, where it was traditionally used as an intoxicating herb for ceremonies and celebration. In small doses, though, it can calm anxiety. "It relaxes the musculature and clears the mind," explains Gladstar, who often prescribes the herb for everyday stressors like airplane flights, public speaking, interpersonal confrontation and PMS symptoms. "The herb was often used to calm combatants within tribes or families," she says. "It is said that when Kava enters the heart, there can be no hate. It helps dispel frustrations so you can work through the conflict and find peaceful solutions."

**Contraindications:** Kava kava should not be taken with alcohol, or used by anyone with hepatitis or other serious liver diseases. Avoid during pregnancy. ✕

### WHERE TO FIND IT

**For bulk herbs, teas & tablets:**

- ▶ Mountain Rose Herbs ([mountainroseherbs.com](http://mountainroseherbs.com))
- ▶ Frontier Natural Products Co-op ([frontiercoop.com](http://frontiercoop.com))
- ▶ Banyan Botanicals ([banyanbotanicals.com](http://banyanbotanicals.com))

**For herbal tinctures, oils & glycerites:**

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