

# Ashwagandha: A Valuable Herb to Boost Your Health



Scientifically-known as *Withania somnifera*, ashwagandha is one of the most powerful rejuvenating (rasayana (<http://www.phcogrev.com/article/2013/7/14/1041030973-7847120506>)) herbs written about since ancient history. It was first mentioned (<https://www.phcogrev.com/sites/default/files/PhcogRev-3-6-229.pdf>) in the famed Ayurvedic classical texts – Charaka and Sushruta – over 2,000 years ago as a promoter of longevity (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/how-to-live-a-long-life-according-to-the-blue-zones>), intelligence, strength, and immunity against disease. However, ashwagandha has been used medicinally for centuries. A sacred staple in Ayurveda, the world's oldest whole-body healing system, ashwagandha continues to be studied and backed by modern science for its wide-ranging adaptogenic (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/the-top-6-adaptogens-and-how-they-benefit-health>) abilities.

What health perks does this age-old herb offer? Here's an overview of ashwagandha's most valuable health benefits and what to consider when incorporating it into your daily routine.

## 7 Vital Health Benefits of Ashwagandha



## 1. Reduces Stress and Anxiety

Ashwagandha is perhaps most well-known for its ability to combat stress by calming the nervous system, thereby reducing anxiety. In Ayurveda, it does this by settling vata, or wind, in the body – which is responsible for all movements, especially through the nervous system. Modern research has shown this anxiolytic and sedative effect in a number of studies. For example, one double-blind, placebo-controlled evaluation concluded (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2958355/>) after 6 weeks that 88% of the study group taking ashwagandha reported a reduction in stress and anxiety, compared to the 50% taking the placebo.

## 2. Balances Cortisol

Another way ashwagandha defends against stress is by supporting the adrenal glands, which are responsible for outputting cortisol. Chronically-stressed (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/solutions-to-chronic-stress>) humans often struggle with adrenal fatigue due to continuous outpouring of this stress hormone, causing spikes, depletion, and eventual burnout. One study (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23439798/>) on chronically stressed adults found that serum cortisol levels were significantly reduced in the group taking ashwagandha root compared to the placebo group – fostering resistance to stress and improving their quality of life.

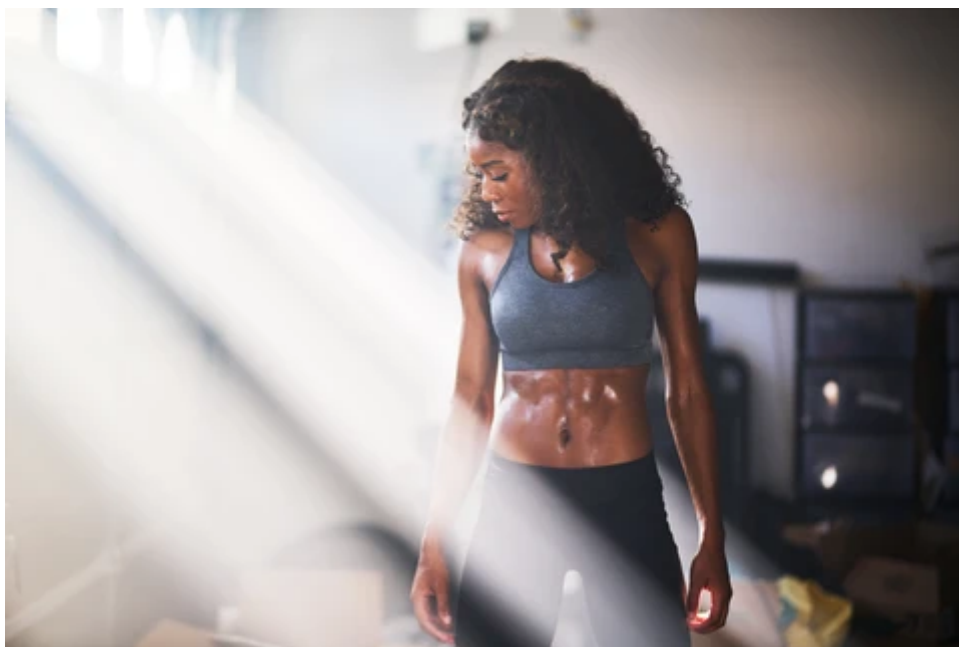
## 3. Enhances Memory and Cognition

Due to its vata-stabilizing quality in Ayurvedic medicine, ashwagandha is used to strengthen and rebuild nerves — improving brain cognition (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/the-top-10-nootropics-you-need-to-enhance-your-cognitive-function>) and enhancing memory. Research (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11064-012-0810-5>) has shown its antioxidant activity not only protects nerves from oxidative damage, it actually restores altered NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) receptor density, the excitatory receptors in the brain that increase such activities as spatial memory capabilities. A human study (<http://www.phcogres.com/article.asp?issn=0974-8490;year=2014;volume=6;issue=1;spage=12;epage=18;aulast=Pingali>) of 20 men reported significant improvement in reaction times, choice discrimination, and other positive cognitive health indicators when supplementing with ashwagandha twice daily, suggesting value when used as a therapeutic adjunct in conditions resulting in impaired cognition.

## 4. Increases Muscular Strength and Endurance

When translated from its Sanskrit origins, ashwagandha literally means, “horse smell.”

Indeed, the herb does smell like a horse, lending merit to the long-lived idea that taking ashwagandha can make one, “as healthy as a horse.” Modern research determined ashwagandha has a modulating effect on body weight — assisting both in gaining muscle mass and shedding body fat. A study (<https://jissn.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12970-015-0104-9>) conducted by the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* found that after 8 weeks of supplementing daily with 600 mg of ashwagandha, subjects showed a significant increase in muscle mass and strength when compared to the control group, additionally reducing their body fat percentage by half.



## 5. Supports Sexual Health

*Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* reported in their published study (<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2011/576962/>) on male fertility that ashwagandha has a regulating effect on hormones other than cortisol. It may increase testosterone levels in men and enhance sperm motility and quality — lending to improved fertility. This could be, in part, due to the ability of ashwagandha to reduce stress and increase the body's antioxidant count. Another study (<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2011/576962/>) found that after just 3 months of supplementation with ashwagandha root powder, 14% of the male subjects' partners became pregnant.

Supplementing with ashwagandha may also benefit women's fertility (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/can-a-low-dose-of-nmn-increase-fertility>) and sexual health. The thyroid, which is chiefly responsible for the healthy hormonal balance needed to support pregnancy, may be regulated by ashwagandha. While further research is needed for more concrete conclusions, one study (<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/acm.2017.0183>) shows hope that ashwagandha can boost levels of T3, T4, and TSH — the main hormones necessary for a healthy thyroid and endocrine system.

## 6. Decreases Inflammation

Due to the natural calmative effect and high antioxidant profile of ashwagandha, it may be useful in lowering systemic inflammation — particularly arthritic inflammation. In an animal study (<https://doi.org/10.1515/jcim-2014-0075>) by the *Journal of Complementary and Integrative Medicine*, ashwagandha displayed its anti-arthritic and anti-inflammatory properties when a marked reduction in the arthritic index and C-reactive protein (CRP) — an inflammation marker — was observed in ashwagandha-supplemented rats. Reduction of inflammation can support enhanced brain cognition, heart health, moods, and more.

## 7. Boosts Immunity to Fight Infection

A person's health is as strong as their immune system (<https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/top-6-medicinal-mushrooms-for-immune-support-and-more>), as it must command and cooperate with all body systems and organs. Twice daily supplementation with ashwagandha root extract has been shown (<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/acm.2008.0215>) to activate the immune system by increasing infection-fighting T cells and natural killer (NK) cells in animals within 96 hours. Other animal studies (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378874199002068?via%3Dihub>) supported its immunomodulating benefits when they found enhanced phagocytic activity of peritoneal

macrophages — macrophages near the abdominal cavity thought to have anti-inflammatory function.

Phagocytes are cells that ingest foreign invaders, such as infectious agents, rendering them harmless to the host.

## Supplementing with Ashwagandha



Because ashwagandha has been a prized herb for multiple millennia, direction on how to take it as a supplement will vary depending upon your advising practitioner. As with any new supplement, always consult with your primary care physician to discuss whether ashwagandha would be the appropriate addition to your daily routine. Keep the following in mind as you determine whether ashwagandha may be able to assist you in your health goals:

**How to Take Ashwagandha:** Ayurvedic doctors are more likely to prescribe the root extract in powder form — mixing it with a carrier like cooling (warmed) milk to offset ashwagandha's innate hot quality. Due to its calming effect, taken nightly before bed is usually advised, as the heaviness of the milk will assist the mind in settling for restful sleep. Modern practitioners may advise a more simple solution, such as taking it in an encapsulated pill form. Dosages and duration of use are highly individual, depending upon the reason for supplementing. It's advised to start with smaller amounts and work your way up slowly as needed.

**Quality:** Some supplement manufacturers don't offer the high-quality (https://www.prohealthlongevity.com/blogs/control-how-you-age/nmn-supplements-review-which-brand-is-best-for-you) ashwagandha needed to receive its therapeutic effects; look for products that use alcohol-free

or chemical-free extraction methods. Also, steer clear of products that contain added binders and fillers, so you get the most for your money. Reputable manufacturers have a customer service department happy to assist in answering any questions you may have about the quality of their ashwagandha source.

**Contraindications:** While ashwagandha has been studied and generally deemed safe, the herb itself does have a “hot” quality to it, according to the Ayurvedic classics. When taken in large doses, this can cause stomach upset or diarrhea. Pregnant or lactating women are advised to avoid taking ashwagandha.

## The Takeaway

Today, ashwagandha is one of the most ancient adaptogenic herbs backed by modern science. Mostly used for its sedative effects on the nervous and endocrine system, supplementing with ashwagandha may result in less stress and general anxiety — leading to a number of health benefits such as boosted immunity, muscle strength, endurance, fertility, brain function, and a greater sense of well-being.