

What Herbs and Supplements Help You Sleep Better?

I probably don't need to remind you about the importance of sleep. Sleep repairs and regenerates tissues, supports immune system function, improves mood and nervous system function, and provides a mental and physical fresh start like nothing else.

But what if you can't sleep? Whether you struggle falling asleep (classic insomnia) or find yourself waking up way too early (sleep maintenance insomnia), the side effects of sleep deprivation are caustic for your health.

Both forms of insomnia can be linked to hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis abnormalities. The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (or HPA axis) manages your body's stress response and can be easily overworked in our hyperactive, overstimulated modern age.

I Can't Go To Bed!

Your system needs some R&R, so let's start with the basics. Here are *six simple practices to help you fall asleep*:

1. Save the rigorous exercise for earlier in the day
2. Turn off your computer, radio, and TV by 8pm.
3. Keep electronic devices at least 10 feet from your bed for an EMF-free sleeping space
4. Create a dark, cave-like space - cover any areas where light creeps in
5. Try to be in bed by 10pm to take advantage of the darkest hours of the night (10pm to 2am)
6. Keep the temperature at a cool, but comfortable level

You can also give yourself a little relief from HPA axis mishaps. For sleep onset insomnia, the following herbs may come in handy:

1. Valerian
2. Chamomile
3. Lavender
4. Hops flower
5. Lemon balm

Luckily you can reap the benefits of these herbs in ALOHA's Sleep Tea. These nervine relaxants will have a relatively quick calming effect on the nervous system to help ease your frantic modern mind and ready your body for sleep.

Valerian has a true sedative effect and is an excellent first choice. If you are taking a strong valerian supplement, be cautious operating machinery and make sure to follow the directions.

Additional herbs for optimal sleep include:

1. Passionflower
2. California poppy
3. Skullcap

Magnesium is another great supplementation for sleep. It can be taken orally or applied topically to relax the mind and body before bed - ALOHA's Foundation provides 25% of your daily value.

I'm Waking Up Too Early!

It's a different ball game for sleep maintenance insomnia (trouble waking up too early). For this type of insomnia, HPA axis abnormalities may be producing spikes of cortisol (a stress hormone regulated by the adrenals) in the middle of the night.

For this form of insomnia, try herbs that help to rejuvenate your adrenals directly, such as:

1. Guduchi (as found in ALOHA's Foundation)
2. Eleuthero
3. The ginsengs
4. Rhodiola
5. Schizandra berry
6. Astragalus
7. Aashwagandha

All of these are adaptogens, which help to support and balance your body's stress response. These herbs improve sleep duration by normalizing the stress response, but they can also make you feel energized. For this reason, take them during the day, rather than before bed.

Some Other Options to Consider...

For both sleep onset and sleep maintenance insomnia, some people find success with melatonin supplements. Keep in mind that taking melatonin may not address the root of your insomnia.

5-HTP is an important precursor to melatonin, and foods like spirulina and spinach, which are featured in ALOHA's Daily Good, and collards provide the tryptophan necessary for your body to make 5-HTP. 5-HTP is also available as a supplement derived from an African plant called griffonia simplicifolia. If you take a 5-HTP supplement, get it from a reputable company, as some have been found to be contaminated with a toxin called Peak X. GABA is another popular supplement for sleep.

GABA is a neurotransmitter that reduces anxiety and, like melatonin, should be made naturally by your body. Your body needs the amino acid theanine to make GABA, and theanine can be found in green tea and bay bolete mushrooms. GABA can also be consumed directly by snacking on cherry tomatoes!

Whatever ails your sleep – taking care of yourself when you're awake will benefit you when you close your eyes.