



AMERICAN
BOTANICAL
COUNCIL

Post Office Box 144345
Austin, Texas 78714-4345
Phone 512/926-4900
Fax 512/926-2345
Email: abc@herbalgram.org
www.herbalgram.org

Mark Blumenthal
Editor

Wayne Silverman, PhD
Underwriting Coordinator

Betsy Levy
Densie Webb, PhD
Leela Devi, MSN, RN
Summary Writers

Karen Newton
Database Manager

Susan McFarland
Ginger Webb
Co-coordinators

Dawnelle Malone
Research Assistant

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HERBCLIP

FILE: Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

DATE: May 30, 1997

HC 052473

RE: Clinical Review of Valerian as Sedative and Related Activity

Brown, Donald. Valerian: Clinical Overview. *Townsend Letter for Doctors*, May 1995, pp. 150-151.

Valerian root (*Valeriana officinalis*) is frequently prescribed for anxiety and insomnia. Research shows it to be an effective yet gentle alternative to the more commonly prescribed benzodiazepine drugs diazepam and alprazolam. These drugs can potentially cause addiction and serious side effects, whereas no evidence has been seen of valerian addiction.

German researchers discovered in 1989 that valerian sedates by binding with benzodiazepine receptors and other receptors in the central nervous system. The weakness of the bond explains valerian's non-addictive nature.

Clinical research supports valerian's use to combat insomnia and improve sleep quality. Dosages of 160 to 450 mg have been shown to effectively shorten wakefulness, reduce night awakenings, improve "sleep efficiency," and increase dream recall. Yet study subjects experienced none of the "hangover" commonly associated with benzodiazepines. In one German study, valerian was supplemented with an extract of lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) (160 mg. Valerian extract; 80 mg. Lemon balm extract per tablet). Alternatively, valerian is sometimes combined with passion flower extract (*Passiflora* spp.)

The author states that some healthcare practitioners are prescribing valerian for management of anxiety based on the findings of sleep studies, although he sites no research specifically on anxiety. Similarly, he states that studies show valerian compares favorably to the drug Propaphen in the treatment of affective disorders.

The author recommends a dosage of 300-400 mg of standardized (0.5% essential oil) valerian extract taken one hour before bedtime for insomnia treatment, and a 200-300 mg. morning dose for anxiety. While he does not directly address the safety of long-term use, he does state that valepotriates, valerian components previously thought to be carcinogenic and teratogenic, are removed by some European valerian extract manufacturers to address

concerns about the safety of the herb for use by pregnant or lactating women, despite the fact that recent studies on pregnant rats indicated that oral ingestion of valepotriates are probably not harmful. Valerian should not be taken with alcohol, and consumers should use caution when driving or operating heavy machinery. The German Commission I monograph does not list any side effects or contraindications for valerian. —*Betsy Levy*