

# HERBCLIP

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FILE: · Herbs for Sleep  
· Sleep disorders  
· Insomnia

DATE: August 30, 1997

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RE:           **Herbs for Sleep Disorders**

Mantle, Fiona. Sleepless and Unsettled. *Nursing Times*, June 5, 1996, Volume 92, No. 23, pp.46-47.

This article is a broad and shallow overview of alternative therapies for insomnia. Because the publication it appeared in caters to nurses, a good portion speaks to the alleviation of sleep-disrupting pain in hospital patients.

Ten to fifteen percent of adults who visit their general practitioners complain of chronic insomnia. The author divides insomnia into three categories: 1) sleep latency, or difficulty in falling asleep; 2) frequent waking after going to sleep; and 3) waking early, which may stem from depression. A subject may suffer from more than one category. The condition is further sub-divided into 1) disruption of orthodox or slow-wave sleep; and 2) disruption of paradoxical or rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which induces mental exhaustion, tension and irritability. The author notes that insomnia can interfere with concentration, learning and memory.

The author claims that chiropractic adjustments, acupuncture, hypnosis, and therapeutic touch have all been effective in alleviating sleep-disrupting pain in hospital patients.

According to the author, the following non-pharmacological insomnia treatments have been shown to reduce sleep latency to less than 30 minutes: 1) restricting time spent in bed to sleeping only; 2) control of mental and chemical (caffeine and alcohol) stimulus before bed; and 3) cognitive relaxation, such as imagery and meditation. Patients suffering from sleep latency responded better to treatment than patients with more complex forms of insomnia. Stimulus control appears to be the single most effective insomnia treatment and reduction of cognitive stimulus was more significant than controlling physiological stimulus. Hypnosis is an effective reinforcement of insomnia therapies.

Many herbs have been used to induce sleep, including, paradoxically, the two stimulants kola and maté (which should be taken during the day). St. John's wort, vervain, ginseng, rosemary, wild lettuce, skullcap, lavender, valerian, passionflower (often combined with valerian), hops, and motherwort have all been used as insomnia treatments. In a double-blind study valerian seemed to improve sleep quality without increasing total sleep time, and without "hang over" or nightmare side effects. The author says that St. John's wort seems to increase the proportion of deep sleep over the entire sleep period without affecting sleep latency, sleep maintenance or total sleep time.

In traditional Chinese medicine, insomnia is expressed as 'empty heart fire,' in which the spirit is said to reside in the mind during the day and in the heart at night. Insomnia may be said to originate in the kidneys, liver, stomach and heart, the house of the spirit. Gypsum or do-it-yourself acupressure may be prescribed. In the UK, pharmacies carry acupressure kits consisting of a disposable isocone to be fixed to acupuncture point Heart 7 on the wrist. A double-blind trial of six healthy subjects found that stimulus of this acupuncture point apparently resulted in a decrease in wakefulness and an increase in non-REM sleep and total sleep time. Thirteen night-crying infants whose Sifend and Pericardium 7 acupuncture points were stimulated all ceased night crying after the third treatment, according to the *Journal of Chinese Medicine* (1994; 46:38).

In a study published in the *International Journal of Chinese Acupuncture* involving 50 subjects and stimulation of the acupuncture points Baihui and Sishenchong, which are located on top of the head and which pull and hold qi (energy) upward, 20 patients slept more than six hours each night (it is not reported how much they slept before treatment), 23 slept for more than four hours, five improved slightly, and two were not helped. Manipulation of these points is believed to regulate cerebral cortex function, which parallels the expression of insomnia in Western medicine.

The aromatherapy oils lavender (*L. angustifolia*), spike lavender (*L. latifolia*), sweet fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), petitgrain ("bitter orange", *Citrus aurantium*), linden (*Tilia* spp.), valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*) have all been used to treat insomnia. Studies seem to support the effectiveness of lavender and bitter orange in particular.

—*Betsy Levy*

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