

Ashwagandha: An Ayurvedic Rasayana

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Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is a well-known medicinal herb used for centuries in traditional Ayurvedic medicine. It is classified as a *Rasayana*, meaning a rejuvenator that enhances physical and mental health. In recent years, ashwagandha has gained global recognition as a natural remedy for various health disorders and has become the subject of extensive scientific research.

The ashwagandha plant is a small shrub with yellow flowers, native to India, Africa, and the Middle East. The roots and berries are primarily used for medicinal purposes, with the root being the most important component in Ayurveda.

Ashwagandha is widely known for its adaptogenic properties, helping the body adapt to stress and normalize physiological functions. It is commonly used to reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, and promote relaxation. Additionally, it

exhibits anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, which help protect against diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disorders.

The herb is also known to support immune function, regulate hormones, improve sleep quality, enhance digestion, and support the nervous system. In Ayurveda, ashwagandha is often combined with



other herbs like *Shatavari* and *Guduchi* to enhance therapeutic efficacy.

Ashwagandha is available in several forms such as powders, capsules, teas, and extracts. When used in recommended doses, it is generally considered safe and effective.

Ashwagandha And History

Ashwagandha is an ancient medicinal herb with a history spanning thousands of years in Ayurvedic

medicine. Its roots, leaves, and berries have been traditionally used to treat stress, anxiety, infertility, weakness, and various chronic ailments.

Native to India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, ashwagandha belongs to the family *Solanaceae*. In Ayurveda, it is classified as a *Rasayana* herb, believed to promote longevity, vitality, and resistance to disease.

The name “Ashwagandha” is derived from the Sanskrit words *Ashva* (horse) and *Gandha* (smell), referring to the strong odor of the root and its ability to impart strength like a horse.

Ashwagandha is extensively mentioned in classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, where it is praised for its rejuvenating and strengthening properties. It is also used in Unani, Chinese, African, and Arabic traditional medicine systems.

Modern scientific research has validated many of its traditional uses, particularly its anti-stress, anti-inflammatory, and neuroprotective effects.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is a traditional system of medicine originating in India more than 5,000 years ago. The term *Ayurveda* is derived from *Ayur* (life) and *Veda* (knowledge), meaning “the science of life.”

Ayurveda is based on the balance of five elements—earth (*Prithvi*), water (*Jala*), fire (*Agni*), air (*Vayu*), and ether (*Akasha*). It recognizes seven body tissues (*Saptadhatu*) and emphasizes balance among the three *Doshas*: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*.

Diseases are believed to arise from imbalance among these elements. Ayurvedic treatment includes

detoxification, herbal remedies, diet, yoga, meditation, and lifestyle modification.

Rasayana

Rasayana refers to rejuvenation therapy in Ayurveda aimed at promoting longevity, vitality, immunity, and mental clarity. *Rasayana* herbs help slow aging, improve resistance to disease, and restore balance among the doshas.

Ashwagandha is one of the most important and widely used *Rasayana* herbs.

Ayurveda and Ashwagandha

Ashwagandha plays a central role in Ayurvedic therapeutics. It acts as an adaptogen, calming the nervous system, improving sleep, enhancing cognition, and reducing anxiety.

It is consumed in the form of powders, capsules, teas, tinctures, and extracts. While generally safe, it should be avoided during pregnancy and used cautiously alongside sedatives.

Ayurvedic Importance of Ashwagandha

According to Ayurveda, ashwagandha promotes vitality, strength, and mental clarity.

Major benefits include:

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Improves brain function and memory
- Boosts immunity
- Reduces inflammation and arthritis
- Improves heart health
- Reduces symptoms of depression
- Enhances athletic performance
- Improves fertility in men and women

Side Effects Of Ashwagandha

- Avoid during pregnancy (risk of miscarriage)

- Avoid with sedatives or anti-anxiety drugs
- High doses may cause nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- May cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals

Indications in Ayurvedic Medicine

Ashwagandha is indicated for conditions such as:

Murchha, Apasmara, Shosha, Unmada, Karshya, Arsha, Arbuda, Gandamala, Bhagandara, Vatarakta, Kushtha, Kilasa, Vidradhi, Asthibhanga, Gridhrasi, Yonidosha, and Hrudgraha, among others.

Chemical Composition of Ashwagandha

Ashwagandha contains several bioactive compounds including:

- Withanolides
- Alkaloids
- Steroidal lactones
- Flavonoids
- Saponins
- Glycowithanolides
- Tannins

These compounds contribute to its adaptogenic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and neuroprotective properties.

References

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Medicinal Parts of Ashwagandha

- **Roots:** Tonic, aphrodisiac, adaptogen
- **Leaves:** Used for inflammation, conjunctivitis
- **Berries:** Digestive and anti-inflammatory
- **Bark:** Used for asthma and skin conditions

Forms of Ashwagandha

- Root powder
- Capsules/Tablets
- Liquid extract
- Tea
- Oil
- Tincture

Conclusion

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is one of the most valuable medicinal plants in Ayurveda and holds a prominent place as a *Rasayana* drug. Its long history of use in traditional medicine, supported by growing scientific evidence, highlights its significance in promoting physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The herb exhibits a wide range of therapeutic properties, including adaptogenic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, immunomodulatory, neuroprotective, and rejuvenating effects.

