

# Managing stress and mood with natural botanicals

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RELEVANT TOPICS

*While botanicals are not a panacea, there is much science-backed evidence for leveraging them to help manage good sleeping habits and reduce stress.*



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Concerns about stress, mood, and mental health continue to grow. For the first time in over a decade, anxiety and stress prevention rose to the top as Americans' leading health concern, according to April 2019 findings reported in [The Hartman Group Health + Wellness Report](#). Mental and emotional health are gaining importance, serving as key indicators of how consumers understand health and wellness.

In April 2020, pharmacy organization Express Scripts published its [America's State of Mind Report](#), which highlighted that the number of antidepressant, anti-anxiety, and anti-insomnia medication

prescriptions filled increased by 21% from February to March this year. (The use of these medications was previously on a steady decline from 2015 to 2019, down 12% and 11.3% in 2015 and 2019, respectively.) The April 2020 report revealed that new prescriptions for antianxiety medications increased nearly 38%. In this context, the outlook for other more long-term, natural approaches is promising.

While making the public aware of services that are available to them for managing these conditions is important, it's incumbent upon us to take charge of our own health.

We see the concern over a number of health conditions that were once the realm of an older population filter down to a younger generation due to multigenerational increases in stress, improper sleep, and other negative health impacts due to factors such as diet and the environment. For instance, today we are gaining more understanding regarding the importance of sleep, not only for rest and repair but also the significant impact it can have on the immune system and overall well-being. It is clear that mood, stress, and sleep are closely intertwined. Research has clearly shown the relationship between the three. Years ago, the focus was primarily on the ability to fall asleep; today, there is greater emphasis on the quality and quantity of sleep and how a good night's rest can improve our well-being.

### **Proactive Measures, Natural Approaches**

Increasingly, consumers are seeking natural products with proven efficacy. More people are looking for natural, holistic alternatives to chemical, artificial, and synthetic therapies. As consumers demand natural versus synthetic health support, they are also not satisfied only with the knowledge that certain herbs and botanicals have been used effectively for thousands of years; they want hard-hitting scientific evidence to support specific health claims and methods of action. Scientific research continues to reinforce and validate the traditional knowledge about many botanicals.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that stress left unmanaged can contribute to serious health problems. Stress triggers the brain to release cortisol into the bloodstream. Many consumers have become aware of this connection and are looking for natural solutions to support healthy mood, manage stress, and aid with quality sleep. And they are looking for long-term solutions for self-care and without unwanted side effects.

Dietary supplements can play a significant role in enabling us to regain balance in our lives while staving off or mitigating the impacts caused by stress and anxiety on our immune systems. Science continues to validate the important roles natural botanicals play in supporting healthy mood and sleep. Below, we highlight a few.

### **Adaptogens**

There is growing awareness of the role of adaptogens in managing stress, and many consumers are turning to time-proven botanicals to help keep moods in check and support quality sleep. Adaptogens play a role in helping to manage the adverse effects of physical and mental stressors and work to bring the body back into a more balanced state. Supplementing our diets with

adaptogenic herbs such as *Rhodiola rosea*, holy basil (tulsi), *Schisandra chinensis*, and *Ziziphus jujubato* to restore balance will become increasingly important.

Rhodiola has been shown to reduce general fatigue under stressful conditions. Also known as golden root, rhodiola is an adaptogen and has been used for centuries in traditional therapies. Today, science continues to validate its efficacy and uncover some of its mechanisms of action.

Managing cortisol levels through the use of rhodiola, for example, can provide for more restful and restorative sleep. Cortisol levels should decline as we fall into sleep and rise when it's time to awake. High cortisol levels due to stress and anxiety are a manifestation of our sympathetic ("fight or flight") system, which is not conducive to rest and relaxation. Rhodiola root extract has been shown to help support healthy cortisol levels, which is also good for our cardiovascular system because high cortisol levels can increase blood pressure and contribute to weight gain.

One of the active constituents found in rhodiola is a glycoside called rosavin. The stress-support properties of rosavin, as well as another component called salidroside, have been attributed to supporting a healthy response to stress. Research has also shown that rhodiola can support healthy levels of corticotropin<sup>1</sup>, a hormone that helps manage biological stress.

Magnolia bark extract is another adaptogenic botanical that holds promise as a facilitator of sleep and has also been shown to help keep moods in check. Phenols from the bark of the magnolia tree, in the form of honokiol and magnolol, have an affinity for CB1 and CB2 receptor sites in the body<sup>2</sup>. These receptor sites are part of the body's own endocannabinoid system that helps facilitate homeostasis (balance) within all metabolic processes that occur in the body. CB1 is directly involved with the nervous system and brain, while CB2 is associated with immunity. Because these lignans have an affinity for these receptors, they can help to support the body's ability to produce its own internal endocannabinoids. Endocannabinoids such as anandamide and 2-AG have been shown to support mood and healthy immune responses. Due to its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, magnolia bark also holds promise in supporting cognition and brain health.

## **Resveratrol**

Mood, on the other hand, can be positively impacted through the use of resveratrol which studies have shown may help reduce the stress hormone corticosterone by inhibiting the expression of the enzyme PDE4.

A recent study completed at the University of Buffalo<sup>3</sup> concluded that resveratrol displays effective stress-management effects in the body and may help support healthy mood.

## **L-theanine**

L-theanine is an amino acid found in green tea that is also beneficial for relaxation, sleep, and anxiety because it naturally supports healthy levels of GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid), which has been shown to support calmness.

## **Hemp Extracts and Cannabinoids**

Phytocannabinoids are gaining a reputation for their ability to support sleep and healthy mood. Thanks to the work of Dr. Raphael Mechoulam and his colleagues<sup>4</sup>, we now have a better understanding of how the endocannabinoid system works and its importance in preserving human health.

Often, the calming effects of CBD can be felt almost immediately. We are seeing increased interest in unique combinations of various cannabinoids and terpenes. We are also innovating around synergistic formulations of CBD in combination with other key botanicals—for example, broad-spectrum hemp oil extract standardized to CBD with sea buckthorn and resveratrol.

### **Don't Make Stress the New Normal**

By aligning ourselves more with nature and recognizing the power of plants, we can be better equipped to deal with stress on a daily basis and in the long term. While botanicals are not a panacea, there is much science-backed evidence that leveraging them in supplemental form along with a healthy diet, exercise, meditation, and good sleep habits can help reduce stress, allow people to enjoy more productive lives, and realize long-term health and wellness benefits.

### **About the Author**

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