

India's secrets

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Ayurvedic herbs are some of the world's most powerful remedies for body and soul, writes Toni Green.

INDIA has one of the oldest healing systems in the world: Ayurveda. Using herbs for wellness is ingrained in their culture and history. Try these ancient remedies for modern ailments.

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)

This translates as “strength of a horse” - a clue to its ability to boost stamina. In Ayurvedic tradition, ashwagandha's properties include medhya (improves cognition and insightfulness), balya (for strengthening and recuperation), rasayana (rejuvenating and life-extending), and nidrajanana (promotes rest). It eases restlessness and insomnia, with research in the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia showing it suppresses changes in the brain's dopamine receptors that are triggered by anxiety or stress, while an Indian Journal of Experimental Biology study discovered that it mimics gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the body, acting as a sedative. Ashwagandha also has a long-standing reputation as an aphrodisiac and for promoting milk production in nursing mothers.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

Used for centuries to enhance flexibility and joint health, much research has been conducted on turmeric's active antioxidant ingredient, curcumin, which provides numerous health benefits, including cancer protection and preserving brain function. Studies also show that turmeric-derived compounds suppress production of inflammatory COX-2 leukotrienes and prostaglandins while simultaneously supporting protective COX-I, making it an effective treatment for arthritis.

Trikatu

This means “three pungents”, and is a combination of black pepper (*Piper nigrum*), Indian long pepper (*Piper longum*), and ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). Trikatu's primary effect is on the upper gastrointestinal tract where it enhances agni, the digestive fire needed for digestion and optimal nutrient absorption. In Ayurveda, trikatu is considered a warming formula, used to ignite agni and destroy ama (accumulated toxins and waste). Trikatu has also



been shown to reduce LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides while elevating cardio-protective HDL (“good”) cholesterol.

Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*)

Long used as a tonic, memory enhancer and aphrodisiac, brahmi has been the subject of extensive research for its roles in mental health. In one study in Phytotherapy Research, significant mood improvements and decreased levels of the stress hormone cortisol were noted amongst participants taking brahmi; other studies show that it has potential for treating chronic pain and neuropathy, boosting cognitive performance, especially in people with Alzheimer's or dementia, and protecting the brain from toxins and oxidative stress.

Tulsi (*Ocimum basilicum*)

Also known as sacred basil, tulsi is considered to open the heart and mind, strengthening devotion, faith, and love. The leaves are a nerve and memory tonic, and are useful in treating respiratory problems, oral infections, and expelling mucus; a decoction is effective for flu, sore throat, coughs, colds, mouth ulcers, bronchitis, and asthma. Tulsi has also been shown to reduce blood sugar and total cholesterol levels. ✨



D-I-Y pain relief pouch

Combine ¾ cup cooked rice, ⅓ cup grated ginger, 1 tablespoon turmeric, ⅓ cup basil and 1 tablespoon of powdered coriander, place in the middle of a tea-towel and tie with string to form a pouch. Pop in the microwave for 90 seconds – it needs to be hot, but not burn skin – then massage over affected area with circular strokes. Bonus: the cooked rice softens skin.

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