



EASE YOUR MIND



Herbs for Mental Health

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Herbs for Mental Health

by
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Medicine County Herbs

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Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Fresh or recently dried herb tincture: 30-120 drops. Tea of recently dried herb: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

St. John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum*

Tincture of fresh flowers and flower buds: 20-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day. St. John's wort can also be taken once each evening before bed. It helps the liver clear stress hormones during the night.

Contra: St. John's wort helps liver detoxification, so it can interfere with the efficacy of some pharmaceuticals. Do not take it if you are currently taking blood thinners, protease inhibitors, organ transplant anti-rejection drugs, or are undergoing chemotherapy. If you are taking oral contraceptives or if you are on estrogen therapy, be aware that St. John's wort may interfere with the effects of the hormones. It does not interfere with testosterone therapy. If you are currently taking an SSRI (anti-depressants known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), use St. John's wort only under the care of a physician. If you are on prescription pain medication, be aware that St. John's wort causes the liver to process the medicine more quickly, possibly necessitating a change in dosage frequency. In cases of severe depression, use caution when taking St. John's wort.

Valerian *Valeriana officianalis*

Fresh or dry root tincture: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 3x a day. Or as needed at night to sleep.

Contra: Valerian can cause overstimulation in some folks. Try it in a small dose first to make sure it has the desired calming effect. Too much valerian can cause headaches, blurred vision, nausea, stupor.

Wood Betony *Pedicularis canadensis*

Tincture of fresh flowering herb: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Note: The plant referred to here is different from *Stachys betonica*, which is also known as Wood Betony.

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Contra: Avoid in cases of severe depression and low heart rate. Also, use caution if combining with pharmaceutical anti-depressants and sedatives.

Peach Leaf *Prunus persica*

Tincture of fresh or dry leaves: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion as needed.

Reishi *Ganoderma lucidum*

Tincture/elixir of dried mushroom: ½ to 1 ½ tsp. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 3x a day.

Rhodiola *Rhodiola rosea*

Tincture of dried root: 15-60 drops. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 3x a day.

Contra: Don't take in the evening. Rhodiola's energizing effect can inhibit sleep in some folks.

Rose *Rosa spp.*

Tincture of dried petals: 15-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day. You can tincture the fresh flowers and flower buds but I find the tincture of dried flowers to be superior in its mood enhancing effects. Rose works better when combined with other herbs. It adds a brightening lift to formulas for depression, anxiety and grief. Like other aromatic herbs, just having the scent around works medicinally. Whether it is in the form of essential oil, rose water or just a bouquet of the flowers themselves, the scent is calming and uplifting.

Rosemary *Rosmarinus officianalis*

Tincture of dry or fresh herb: 15-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Schisandra *Schisandra chinensis*

Tincture of dried berries: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard decoction, both to 3x a day. You can also make a cold infusion of the berries by placing a handful in a glass of water and letting them soak for a few hours. They make a refreshing, cooling drink.

Contra: Avoid in pregnancy.

tincture of milky oat seed: 30-90 drops up to 4x a day. Oat seed doesn't keep that well dry, but you can make a nice calming tea with oat straw, the stalks and leaves of oat grass. Standard infusion as needed.

Contra: The gluten-like proteins in oats can cause allergic or inflammatory response in gluten intolerant folks or folks with Celiac disease.

Mimosa tree *Albizia julibrissin*

Tincture of fresh or dried bark: 30-90 drops. Tea of dried bark: standard decoction. Both to 3x a day. Take at night to prevent nightmares. The fresh flowers make a beautiful tincture. They're not as strong and have a lighter effect. In other words the flower tincture is more brightening than grounding. Mimosa is an invasive plant, especially in the deep south. So harvest as much as you want and simultaneously help the native species displaced by this beautiful invasive.

Contra: Avoid in pregnancy.

Motherwort *Leonorus cardiaca*

Tincture of fresh or dry flowering herb: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 4x a day.

Contra: Avoid in pregnancy.

Nettle (Stinging Nettle) *Urtica dioica*

While you can use tincture of nettle, for our purposes I highly recommend the tea. Nettle is one of the most nutrient rich plants and its minerals are much more accessible when taken as a hot tea. As a tea, nettle supports mental health across the board. Its minerals help build and nourish the nervous system while helping rid the body of toxins. Tea: standard infusion to 3x a day.

Contra: nettle can be drying so use caution in dry constitutions.

Passionflower *Passiflora incarnata*

Tincture of fresh or dry flowering herbs: ½ to 1 ½ tsp. Tea of recently dry herb: standard infusion. Both to 4x a day.



Despair. Anger. Confusion. Frustration. Outrage. Hopelessness. Excitement. Desperation. Paranoia. Anxiety. Grief. Fear. All of these emotions are appropriate responses to the world we live in. An over-stimulating world with constant news of catastrophe, extinction, decimation, violence, cruelty and the reality of our complicity in these horrors. Yet were one to express any of these emotions to a doctor, the likely outcome would be diagnosis and medication. A sane response to an insane world is often deemed pathological by health practitioners in the dominant medical system. However, even as we critique this process, we're still sad, scared, confused, overwhelmed and despondent. We still need help. So what can we do?

The modern world contributes to, if not outright creates, the conditions of mental disorder. Even if a person can survive the violence of our racist, misogynist, homophobic and classist society, they may not survive intact. Those privileged to have been born to a life without constant threat of violence still experience the day to day alienation that has become the defining trait of our time. The human needs for meaning and purpose are rarely met in this hectic, isolating life. Ideally, we would all work to change the systems that keep us alienated and threaten our sanity. However, this work is a luxury to many who exist in survival mode, barely feeding themselves or their families. And those who have dedicated their lives to working for change face burnout and despair at the seeming futility of the work. So what can we do to address the damage to our psyches done by the systems of domination? What follows is a primer on the use of medicinal herbs to support mental health.



Why HERBS?

Why should we turn to herbs for mental health? Because they work. While many physical conditions take time to heal when using herbal medicine, one can often feel immediate noticeable effects when using herbs for mental states. Unlike pharmaceuticals, herbs don't suppress emotional symptoms. They actually help us respond to stress in healthier ways. Herbs help our bodies and minds heal themselves. Sometimes our brains get stuck in patterns of reaction. When grief or worry become the norm, we have to remember how to experience joy. We have to relearn appreciation. Herbs help us remember. Unlike the pharmaceutical maintenance approach to mental health, in which our growth process is stunted by suppressive medicines, herbs help us move through and integrate mental states, growing stronger and wiser in the process. They help heal the symptoms as opposed to hiding the symptoms.

Why Herbs?

Learning to treat ourselves, to grow and wildcraft our own herbs, to make our own medicine puts our mental health in our own hands. To

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Tincture of fresh flowers and flower buds, tincture of fresh or dried berry. Many herbalists combine the two: 15-60 drops to 3x a day. Tea: decoct berries, infuse flowers up to 3x a day.

Contra: Do not use in cases of diastolic congestive heart failure. Use caution when using digitalis based products, antihypertensives, nitrates and/or beta-blockers.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

Tincture of fresh or dry herb 30-90 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Hops *Humulus lupulus*

Tincture of fresh or dry strobiles: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day or as needed at night.

Contra: Do not use in cases of clinical depression. Do not use in cases of estrogen positive tumors. Do not take if you are allergic to hops. Caution with CNS depressants.

Kava Kava *Piper methysticum*

Tincture of dried or fresh root: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard decoction or cold infusion. Both up to 3x a day.

Contra: Do not take in cases of Parkinson's disease.

Lavender *Lavandula officianalis*

Tincture of dried flowers: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Lavender essential oil works well topically. Just apply a little oil to your wrist or temples or put some in your bath water.

Lemon Balm *Melissa officianalis*

Fresh flowering herb tincture: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both up to 3x a day.

Milky Oat Seed *Avena sativa*

Milky oat seed is the immature seed of the oat plant. Harvest it when the green seeds exude a milky latex when squeezed. Fresh

Calamus *Acorus calamus*

Tincture of fresh or dry root: 15-45 drops. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 4x a day.

Contra: Drinking too much calamus tea can cause nausea and vomiting. Avoid during pregnancy.

California poppy *Eschscholtzia californica*

Fresh flowering herb tincture: 15-25 drops up to 3x a day, or once at night. Tea: standard infusion as needed.

Catnip *Nepeta cataria*

Fresh flowering herb tincture: ¼ to 1 tsp. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 4x a day.

Chamomile *Matricaria recutita*

Tincture of dried or fresh flowers: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Damiana *Turnera diffusa*

Tincture of fresh or dry flowering herb: 20-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

Eleuthero (a.k.a. Siberian Ginseng) *Eleutherococcus senticosus*

Tincture of dried root: 30-90 drops. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 3x a day.

Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba*

Tincture of leaves: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day. Some herbalists prefer standardized extract.

Contra: Do not take in cases of vasodilative headaches. Ginkgo is a blood thinner so avoid using with aspirin or pharmaceutical blood thinners.

Gotu kola *Centella asiatica*

Tincture of fresh herb tincture: 15 – 30 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day.

take that step, to claim our health as our own dominion, not hand it over to “experts” is immensely empowering. We step out from under the insidious influence of both the pharmaceutical corporations, who are more interested in lifetime users than in healing their customers and the doctors who work for them. As we learn to name our own mental states and what eases them, we take some of the power away from the forces that benefit from our sorrow, anxiety and fear.

Why Herbs?

This world is ailing. This sickens us. Plant medicines help alleviate both maladies. Humankind has largely lost our connection to the earth. Had we not, we would not be able to so thoroughly decimate it. This severance causes and perpetuates our sickness. When we turn to plants for help, we reconnect with nature. This is a step towards healing, healing of ourselves and our world. Meeting medicinal plants in the wild and growing them in the garden are part of the medicine. But even if those aren't options, just using herbal medicine helps us reconnect.

How to Use this Book

This book is arranged by symptom rather than by plant. Most herbals are arranged by plant with lovely monographs of each herb. I wanted this book to be accessible to all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. So, instead of skimming a plant monograph looking for the symptoms you'd like to ease, the herbs are arranged by the condition they support. Many of the herbs can be found in several sections. If you are looking to ease a particular condition, look at the table of contents and then turn to the section that corresponds to the condition. There, read over the herbs that are specific for that mental state. Compare them and see which herb best suits you or is easiest for you to access. Before you take an herb, please turn to the contraindications and dosage section to ensure it is a safe plant for you. If you want to know all the mental states covered here that a particular herb supports, look in the index for a complete list.

Herbs and Holistic Health

There are many, many factors that influence our mental health: diet, exercise, stress, family, work, community, sleep. The herbs covered here work better when our bodies are well fed and well rested. However, we can't always eat well or get enough sleep. Nor do we have much control over our work places, families or friends. So while I encourage you to work towards a healthier way of life, whatever that means for you, I know that's not always possible. *These herbs can help us even when the basics of a healthy life seem out of reach.* Don't avoid using these tools because the rest of your life isn't what you deem healthy. There's a good chance that when you use herbs to ease tension, to lift your spirit, to clear your mind, you may feel up to making some other changes.

the problem of DIAGNOSIS

A diagnosis is *meant* both to help a clinician treat their client and to help the client better understand their condition. As our medical system has become increasingly intertwined with the demands of insurance companies, diagnosis has also become a requirement for the funding of treatment. Unfortunately, diagnosis comes with its own side effects, though we are seldom, if ever, informed of them. While it can be a relief to learn that there is something beyond our control dictating our emotional states, we may come to define ourselves by our diagnosis. This can limit our

Dosage and Contraindications

Anemone/Pulsatilla *Anemone occidentalis, A. hirsutissima, A. tuberosa, A. quinquefolia, Pulsatilla spp.*

Tincture of fresh plant only. Very LOW DOSE. Take 3-10 drops as needed up to 4x a day.

** While anemone is a low dose herb, some people require more of it than others. Start slowly, with a drop or two. If, after a few minutes, you don't feel any change, try a couple more drops. You can keep experimenting this way up to 15 drops. Some species, like *A. quinquefolia*, require higher doses in most people. For this species, the upper limit is 30 drops.

Contra: Do not use in cases of low heart rate. Too much anemone causes nausea and disorientation.

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Tincture of dry root only: 30-60 drops of tincture. Tea: standard decoction. Both to 3x day or once at night.

Contra: Do not take if allergic to members of the nightshade family. Do not take during pregnancy. Do not take in cases of hyperthyroidism.

Bacopa *Bacopa monniera*

Tincture of fresh or dry herb: 30 -60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3-4x day.

Black Cohosh *Actaea racemosa*

Tincture of fresh or dry root: 10-25 drops to 3x a day.

Contra: Use caution if taking pharmaceutical hypertensives, it may have an additive effect.

Blue Vervain *Verbena hastata*

Tincture of fresh or dry flowering herb: 30-60 drops. Tea: standard infusion. Both to 3x a day. Blue vervain has a strong flavor and might not be palatable to most as a tea.

Contra: Avoid during pregnancy. Large doses may cause nausea.

jar about a third of the way up. Fill the jar with high proof alcohol. In both cases let sit 2-4 weeks. Strain.

More precise method, fresh plant tincture: Chop the herbs as finely as possible. For above ground plants I use a food processor. Weigh the herb. You can get a good digital scale for not much money at kitchen stores, office supply stores and some hardware stores. Place the herb into a clean jar. Pour high proof alcohol over the herb at twice the weight by volume. For example, if you have 4 oz of lemon balm, cover with 8 oz. of alcohol. Let sit 2-4 weeks. Strain.

Dry plant tincture: Grind plant material to a coarse powder. Weigh the herb. Pour 50% (100 proof) alcohol (ex. vodka) over the herb at 5 x the weight by volume. For example, if you have 4oz of dried rose petals, cover with 20oz of 50% alcohol. Shake the mixture for a couple of minutes twice a day for a month. Strain.

Glossary

adaptogen: any of a class of herbs that support the body's resistance to stress, both physical and emotional

anxiolytic: an agent that dispels anxiety

nervine: an herbal agent that reduces stress and anxiety by soothing and repairing the nervous system

specific: in herbalism, uniquely suited to remedy a condition

perimenopause: the period 2-8 years before cessation of menstruation during which cycles of ovulation and menstruation become irregular

tonic: an herb used for an extended period of time to strengthen and repair either a specific organ or organ system or the entire body

capacity for change. Diagnosis may lead to resignation, to accepting a mental condition as static and unchangeable. But no matter the severity of our symptoms, our symptoms do not define us. You are more than your depression, more than your anxiety. You are more than someone with PTSD. More than a short attention span. More than someone with horrific pre-menstrual symptoms. So while this booklet is organized by symptom, don't become too identified with your mental state. Identifying too strongly with your symptoms can prevent change.

Critique of the Concept of Mental Health

Since its inception, the field of mental health has both helped and hurt those it claims to heal. While many people find relief from consulting mental health care practitioners, there has always been an over-arching bias towards the forced "normalization" of the individual. Traits that once may have led a person to be labeled a seer or visionary now lead to medication or institutionalization. Difference itself has often been deemed pathological in the history of psychiatry. People of color, women, and gay, transgender and indigenous folks have all suffered pharmacological, institutional and even surgical abuse in the name of mental health.

This book is not meant to add to the body of writing and conventional thinking that says we should all act and feel the same, that average is best, that deviance from the dominant norm is pathological. Quite the contrary, often that which sets us apart is our greatest asset. Seeing and experiencing the world differently from others is fundamentally creative. The association of mental instability with artistic vision is so established as to be almost cliché. However, sometimes our mental states are too much to bear. The world seems too bleak to go on. We hurt ourselves. We hurt others. Anxiety keeps us from leaving our rooms. Or less drastically, we are just tired of feeling bad, of not being able to appreciate the good in our lives. This book is meant to help those who want to take their mental health into their own hands, not so that we are all the same but so that we all have tools for managing our mental states.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a state of intense apprehension, worry or dread. This apprehension may present as a general uneasiness of mind or may be connected to specific stressors. It is often accompanied by physical symptoms: shaking, pain or tightness in the gut, heart palpitations, headaches, muscle tension and/or muscle tremors or tics.

Anemone/Pulsatilla *Anemone occidentalis, A. hirsutissima, A. quinquefolia, A. tuberosa, Pulsatilla spp.*

Anemone is a powerful herb and should only be taken in drop doses. It is extremely grounding and therefore useful for treating panic attacks. Anemone soothes the shaky feeling that follows shock or trauma. It's also a useful herb for migraines, especially when used in the aural phase of the migraine.

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Used in ayurvedic medicine for thousands of years, ashwagandha helps the body adapt to stress. It helps us become more resilient both to everyday stress and to exceptional stress. It's good for worriers, obsessive types and folks who may get a lot done but maintain a high level of stress to do so. Ashwagandha also helps folks who live in fear due to past events even when the threat is gone. It can be used tonically and/or situationally, meaning you can use it every day or in specific times of stress (social engagements, deadlines, conflict, family gatherings.) Ashwagandha is good for folks frazzled from stress. It strengthens the mind/body so our reactions to stress, both physiological and emotional, are less damaging to our systems.

Blue Vervain *Verbena hastata*

Blue vervain is a powerful and underused nervine. It is helpful in treating most forms of anxiety. Blue vervain is especially good for folks who

Disclaimer: Sometimes herbs aren't enough

While I've felt immense support and relief from herbal medicine, sometimes herbs aren't enough. My own healing process required the support of a Somatic Expression therapist. Some folks may take pharmaceuticals for a while until they feel better enough to take care of themselves, then use herbs to manage their mental health. Other folks will take pharmaceuticals for the rest of their lives, lives which will last exponentially longer, by their estimation, with chemical support. So while I've compiled this list of herbs that support mental health and spent some time criticizing the conventional mental health system, don't feel guilty if you need more than herbs can give. Seek other help if you need it.

How to Make Herbal Medicines

Herbal tea is the extraction of the medicinal properties of plants into hot water.

An herbal **infusion** is a tea made with the more delicate parts of plants: flowers, flower buds, leaves and some stems. To make an infusion, pour a cup of boiling water over a tablespoon of herb. Let steep 20-30 minutes. To make more tea at once, pour a quart of boiling water over an ounce of herb.

An herbal **decoction** is a tea made with the tougher parts of plants: bark, roots, seeds and dried berries. To make a decoction, place one tablespoon of herb per 8 ounces of water. Heat slowly and simmer for 20 - 45 minutes, making sure the water doesn't boil off.

A **tincture** is a liquid extraction of plant matter, usually into alcohol, though glycerin and vinegar can also be used:

Folkloric method: If tincturing the fresh above ground parts of a plant, fill a jar as tightly as possible with the well chopped herb. Cover with high proof alcohol (190 proof if possible.) If tincturing fresh root, fill a

On Letting Go

A few years ago I was brought low, lower than low. Despite having much in my life worth celebrating, I mostly felt pain. Through the use of herbs and with the help of my therapist, I began to climb out of the abyss. In the midst of this ascent, I came upon an unlikely adversary—myself. I had been through much and was afraid of change. I was afraid a happier, more stable person wouldn't remember all I'd been through. My identification with grief was forged in New Orleans in the years after Hurricane Katrina. Healing the wounds from that time and place seemed to be a form of forgetting which would be inexcusable. To live through a day without grieving my dead would be a dishonor to their lives. To spend a day without remembering the loss of so many I never knew to the storm and its aftermath would be to become a callous person who ignored the injustices of the world. To hear the news without crying would make me as hardened and careless as the people who profit from pain and destruction. To live with less pain seemed like a privilege I did not want to embrace. In short, I feared becoming someone who had suffered much but had learned nothing. Seven years after the storm I took a risk in the hopes of appreciating my life again. The gamble paid off. I learned to enjoy my life and did not become an entirely different person. I still remember the joyous lives of those who died. I still feel sorrow for what happened and continues to happen to New Orleans. I am still outraged and saddened by the daily news. But I am no longer debilitated by all the loss. I had to let go of my identification with grief to live. Part of healing requires letting go of certain conceptions of our selves. This flexibility allows the herbs that support mental health to work more efficiently. This is not to say that we are "cured" and never need herbs again. However, once you learn to recognize your mental states and which herbs help, you can reach for them when you need them.

think too much. It eases tension, especially in those with impossibly high standards for themselves and others. Blue vervain relaxes driven, idealistic folks who may inadvertently impose their will upon others. It is specific for those who hold tension in their neck and shoulders. When anxiety is linked to expectations of one's self and others, blue vervain can blunt the sharpness of our critiques, improving our relationships and our moods. It doesn't make us dull, just more tolerant. Blue vervain is also for the grudge collector, those of us who brood over perceived injustices to the point of constant anxiety.

Catnip *Nepeta cataria*

Catnip is a gentle, powerful nervine. This mint eases mental tension as well as tension held in the body. It is refreshing and calming, eases nervousness, soothes irritability, and dissipates irrational fears and panic attacks. Catnip is a digestive aid and thus is an excellent remedy for anxiety accompanied by stomach aches and digestive problems. When worrying has your gut tied in knots and you've lost your appetite, try catnip. It unties those knots and imparts a sense of calm and well-being.

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Hawthorn is nourishing and restorative to the heart. Since chronic anxiety stresses the heart muscle, Hawthorn helps heal that damage. Hawthorn opens the metaphoric heart to forgiveness so we can let go of grudges that keep us anxious. It's calming, especially for fidgety, talkative folks. Hawthorn works better the longer that you take it.

Kava Kava *Piper methysticum*

Kava is a wonderful tool for treating anxiety because it promotes a general sense of well being. It is helpful for fighting bouts of social anxiety as well and for easing panic attacks. Kava also helps ease muscle tension that often accompanies anxiety.

Lavender *Lavandula officinalis*

Lavender, from the Latin *lavare*, to clean, is a mind cleanser. When we hold onto thought patterns and frameworks even after a situation has improved, lavender helps us move out the mind clutter, making room for fresh perspectives. It's good for folks with picky, perfectionist tendencies

and/or obsessive thoughts. Lavender is calming and helps ease tension, both that held in the muscles and that held in the mind. It restores and repairs the nervous system, soothes the overworked and rejuvenates those suffering from mental exhaustion. Lavender also eases irritability, thus easing the suffering of those around us.

Lemon Balm *Melissa officianalis*

Lemon balm is a gentle but powerful herb. It is calming and soothing. Lemon balm helps with general anxiety, panic attacks, heart palpitations and nervousness. It has an energizing effect, especially for those who are weakened by nervousness and anxiety.

Milky Oat Seed *Avena sativa*

The term milky oat seed refers to the seeds of oats harvested during the phase of development in which they exude a milky, latex-like substance when squeezed. Milky oat seed is one of our most powerful allies in fighting anxiety. Oats tone and nourish the structure of the nervous system. They repair nerves damaged by long term stress. The expression "my nerves are frazzled" is literal. Our nerve cells become frayed from chronic stress and anxiety. This can lead to nervous exhaustion. Oats help heal these damaged cells. Oats are building and nourishing. When we've pushed ourselves too hard, when we are drained and overwhelmed, oats help repair the damage done to our bodies/minds. Oats ease anxiety in times of acute stress as well as during long term chronic stress. If you know you are going into a stressful situation, take oats as a preventative. They lessen our reactions to stressors. Oats are great for social anxiety. They help folks who are on edge, who are hyper-vigilant, who keep feeling afraid long after a threat has gone. Oats relax us when we can't let our guards down, when our nervous systems won't let go of stress. Oats ease general anxiety, mood swings, emotional over-reaction, and crying jags. They are especially effective when used over an extended period of time.

Motherwort *Leonorus cardiaca*

As the Latin name suggests, motherwort is heart medicine. It nourishes and strengthens the heart and blood vessels which can become weakened

BIPOLAR

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder characterized by episodes of elevated or agitated moods, known as mania, alternating with episodes of depression. Folks with this condition cycle between high and low episodes. Many people who may not fit the official diagnostic criteria of bipolar disorder may still be on the bipolar spectrum if they experience highs and lows in cycles.

Eleuthero (a.k.a. Siberian ginseng) *Eleutherococcus senticosus*

Eleuthero is an adaptogen that gives a sense of calm well-being while also having an energizing effect. Therefore it is helpful both in manic and depressive phases. Eleuthero stabilizes mood and helps us find balance.

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Hawthorn balances mood. It is both calming in times of agitation and hyper-stimulation and uplifting in times of depression. It soothes and strengthens the heart muscle. Hawthorn works in acute episodes but works better as a tonic. It works better the longer you use it.

Rhodiola *Rhodiola rosea*

There is some controversy around the use of this herb in the treatment of bipolar symptoms, specifically mania. While some folks report a balancing effect in both high and low cycles, others warn against its use for anyone prone to mania, reporting an exacerbating effect. If you or someone you know uses rhodiola, watch for signs of agitation or mania. Rhodiola may help balance mood for some folks while throwing others off balance.

mind. It enhances cerebral circulation and therefore improves memory and general cognitive function.

Lavender *Lavandula officianalis*

Lavender clarifies and stimulates thought processes. It is especially helpful for mental fog that accompanies depression. Lavender also repairs the nervous system frazzled from stress.

Lemon Balm *Melissa officianalis*

Lemon balm protects the mind from over-stimulation. Like holy basil, lemon balm is simultaneously calming and uplifting. Lemon balm calms the restless, enhances memory and improves general cognitive function. It eases the symptoms of ADD/ADHD and is a good choice for children.

Nettle *Urtica dioica*

One of the most nutrient rich herbs, nettle nourishes the nervous system. It is energizing, clarifies thought processes, and improves concentration. It sharpens our responses and improves memory.

Rosemary *Rosmarinus officianalis*

Rosemary clears mental fog, especially that stemming from depression. It streamlines thought processes, sharpens the senses and improves memory.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap is specific for oversensitivity to stimuli. When too much information overwhelms, try skullcap. It puts us squarely in the present and helps us sift through all the information we are flooded with to help us focus and prioritize.

from anxiety and stress. It's specific for nervousness and panic attacks accompanied by heart palpitations. Motherwort imparts a feeling of safety. Its common name refers to its nurturing, protective energy and it is useful when we feel a lack of support. Motherwort calms us when we are feeling overly emotional and helps us think before we act when we are acting impetuously from nervousness. When we aren't eating because we are upset, motherwort helps by stimulating hunger and aiding digestion. Motherwort helps with generalized anxiety, nervousness and panic attacks.

Passionflower *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower is specific for anxiety accompanied by or due to circular thinking. When you can't turn off inner chatter, have obsessive thoughts, can't stop worrying or just think too much, try passionflower. It helps quiet the mind and stops the endless loop of worries. Passionflower eases general anxiety, mood swings, nervousness, restlessness, teeth-grinding and stress headaches.

Reishi *Ganoderma lucidum*

Reishi is an adaptogenic mushroom that comes to us from Chinese medicine. While it is primarily used for its immune system support, reishi is a powerful ally for dealing with chronic stress. Reishi is calming and nourishing. Used tonically, reishi imparts a deep foundational sense of peace. Its medicine is similar to that of a long walk in the woods, far from the noises of civilization. It eases the anguish of the chronic worrier and promotes a sense of well-being. Reishi helps us respond to stress in ways that prevent the creation of more stress.

Schisandra *Schisandra chinensis*

Schisandra is a calming adaptogen. Used tonically, it eases anxiety and supports the body depleted by chronic stress.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap is a grounding sedative that soothes the effects of stress and anxiety on the body. It eases tight muscles, nervous tremors, tics, headaches and muscle spasms stemming from stress. Skullcap helps ease

over-sensitivity to stimulus that often accompanies anxiety. It lessens irritability, agitation, edginess, and loose tempers. Skullcap eases anxiety that manifests in picking, fidgeting, nail-biting and other nervous behaviors.

Valerian *Valeriana officianalis*

Valerian is a fast acting sedative. When anxiety or stress leads to muscular twitches, shaking, heart palpitations and/or indigestion, try valerian. It helps in times of nervous fatigue and even nervous breakdown. Valerian can help us when we have that "I can't take any more" feeling. Overwhelmed, ready to scream? Try valerian. It does agitate some folks so start slowly to see if it calms you down or amps you up.

Wood Betony *Pedicularis canadensis*

Wood betony is a skeletal muscle relaxer. It soothes tightness in the muscles that accompanies anxiety and stress. We hold our stress in our bodies. That tightness keeps us from realaxing and letting go. Wood betony helps us relax our muscles so we can let go of internalized stress.

DEPRESSION

DESPAIR

Depression is a mental state characterized by feelings of extreme sadness and hopelessness. It may also involve an inability to concentrate, insomnia, loss of appetite, morbid thoughts and lack of affect.

Despair is a feeling of futility or defeat, a complete loss of hope.

Anemone/Pulsatilla *Anemone hirsutissima, A. tuberosa, A. occidentalis, A. quinquefolia, Pulsatilla spp.*

Anemone is a low dose, heavy-hitting herb. Drop doses ease the pain of

Calamus *Acorus calamus*

Calamus supports cognition. It promotes cerebral circulation and thus improves memory, clears the mind, enhances awareness and facilitates focus. Calamus rejuvenates the brain and nervous system.

Eleuthero (a.k.a. Siberian ginseng) *Eleutherococcus senticosus*

Another adaptogen, Eleuthero helps the body deal with stress and nourishes the brain and nervous system. It improves concentration and increases mental alertness. Eleuthero eases signs of general over-stimulation as well as ADD/ADHD.

Gingko *Gingko biloba*

Gingko increases cerebral circulation. It improves memory, eases symptoms of dementia in the elderly and helps repair damage from head trauma.

Gotu kola *Centella asiatica*

Gotu kola is a powerful aid to cognitive function. It improves concentration, enhances memory, eases mental fatigue and facilitates focus. It eases symptoms of ADD/ADHD especially when paired with calming herbs. Gotu kola decreases senility in the elderly and repairs damage from head trauma.

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Hawthorn is a gentle nervine, calming while not sedating. It is an excellent herb for the treatment ADD/ADHD and is a good choice for children. It helps us find balance and focus when we are over-stimulated, an everyday occurrence for most folks in the modern world. Hawthorn is specific for fidgety folks who can't stop talking. It works in the moment but has a more profound effect when used over a period of time.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

Holy basil, also known as tulsi, is a gentle, powerful herb that is paradoxically calming and stimulating. It soothes the over-stimulated mind and is grounding and centering, bringing us to the here and now, helping us focus. Holy basil helps clear mental fog and refreshes the exhausted

MATTERS OF ATTENTION

ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder

AD/HD: Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Some symptoms of a deficit in attention: trouble concentrating and focusing, forgetfulness, inattention to detail, getting bored easily, changing activities quickly and frequently, trouble completing tasks, losing things, trouble listening, easily confused, slow mental processing, difficulty following instructions, impulsivity, impatience, frequent interrupting, fidgeting, difficulty being quiet or still.

That being said, "Hearing someone say 'I've got ADD' in a culture of such vast distraction is a bit like having a fellow passenger on an ocean liner tell you that she feels afloat. Who doesn't?" -Garrett Keizer

The diagnostic parameters for ADD and ADHD could apply to many of us. The following herbs support not only those who feel severely affected by these traits but also those of us who just need help focusing or who may have made some choices in our lives that affect our memory.

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Ashwagandha is a calming adaptogen. It helps our minds/bodies deal with stress. When stress causes cloudy, jumbled thinking and an inability to focus, try ashwagandha. It calms the agitated, over-stimulated mind. Ashwagandha has also been used for centuries by those whose minds are exhausted from frequent meditation.

Bacopa *Bacopa monnieri*

Bacopa improves memory, enhances focus and sharpens the mind. It facilitates recovery from head trauma and is helpful in treating ADD/ADHD.

despondency, especially when accompanied by thoughts of impending doom. Anemone soothes self-pity, gloominess, agitated mind, irritability. It is powerfully grounding and centering. Depression marked by nervous irritation, scatterbrain, hysteria and/or lack of focus calls for anemone. For short term despair, uncontrollable crying with or without cause, try anemone.

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Ashwagandha is an adaptogen that soothes and nourishes the depleted. For folks suffering from debilitation from mental anguish, situational stress, sickness or other stressors, ashwagandha calms the nerves and revitalizes the entire system. Ashwagandha is specific for depression accompanied by anxiety, agitation and/or sleeplessness. It helps folks sleep well, lessening the effects of stress during the day. Ashwagandha is a building adaptogen, nourishing and strengthening bodies weakened by stress.

Black Cohosh *Actaea racemosa*

Black cohosh is specific for depression characterized by dark, brooding affect. Deep, dark depression that seems to descend from nowhere calls for black cohosh.

Damiana *Turnera diffusa*

Damiana is a gentle mood elevator that works best in mild cases of depression. This desert herb helps folks feel better in their bodies and is therefore indicated in cases of depression marked by loss of libido. It is energizing and helps with stagnant forms of depression. Damiana restores exhausted nerves and spirits, giving a gentle lift when you're down. It is especially helpful for depression in the elderly.

Eleuthero (a.k.a. Siberian Ginseng) *Eleutherococcus senticosus*

Eleuthero is an adaptogen that gently elevates mood and supports the body under stress. It is a building tonic herb that supports the immune system. Hence, it is beneficial to those debilitated by stress or chronic illness. Eleuthero helps us deal with stress in healthier ways so when we encounter stressors that might trigger depression, we can stop the cycle of reaction.

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Hawthorn nourishes both the literal and metaphoric heart. It eases

depression and despair, especially when those states stem from heartbreak of some kind, be it a breakup or the loss of a loved one. For those of us who feel things intensely, just hearing the news can be heartbreaking. Hawthorn strengthens our resilience, thickens our skins while refraining from making us callous. When I feel full, when despair is always just under the surface and I can barely stand to hear another harsh word, I take hawthorn. It works better over time, so I use it with other faster-acting herbs. Hawthorn also facilitates forgiveness, so if sadness remains due to feeling wronged, try hawthorn. This rose family herb helps us feel safe so we can trust again after a period of intense heartache. Hawthorn is also helpful for folks who have trouble expressing their emotions. This tendency can sometimes lead to pent up emotions, leading to depression and lack of affect. Hawthorn helps us feel safe enough to express ourselves while simultaneously warding off the shadow of despair.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

Holy basil is a gentle and effective anti-depressant. It is especially useful when depression has us feeling stuck and unable to change. Whether one is having trouble recovering from a traumatic event or is just unable to remember how to feel something other than sadness, try holy basil. It is refreshing and energizing, helping us find the energy to get up and out of our malaise. Holy basil freshens our perspective, helping us see things anew. Depression often keeps us from seeing the good in our lives; it obfuscates the beauty in the world around us. We actually see differently under its influence. Holy basil is a brightener, working both to brighten our perspective and even our awareness of our everyday lives. It cuts through the mental fog and fatigue that often accompany depression, allowing us both to see and move towards the way out.

Lavender *Lavandula officianalis*

Lavender is a deceptively gentle herb. While its effect may seem mild, it can have long-lasting dramatic effects. It is both calming and uplifting and is especially effective in cases of stagnant depression. When sadness lingers long after our lives have changed for the better, lavender can help. Lavender has long been used in cleaning products; the French and Italian words for washing derive from the same root as the plant name, the Latin *lavare*, to wash. This association points to its effect on the mind. Lavender cleans out the cobwebs of the mind. Sometimes we hold onto ideas or feelings just because we have had them so long we have grown

Calamus *Acorus calamus*

Calamus clears the foggy brain that often accompanies marijuana use. It also clears the fog that often follows excessive drinking, in other words, hangover brain.

Gotu kola *Centella asiatica*

Gotu kola improves brain function and enhances memory. It repairs damaged brain cells and thus helps us recover from damage done from substance use.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

Holy basil helps clear mental fog associated with the use of marijuana and/or alcohol.

Milky Oats *Avena sativa*

Oats are a valuable support for transitioning away from addiction/substance use. Oats soothe social anxiety so they help when quitting or taking a break from drinking. They are also extremely helpful when quitting smoking. Oats soothe the nervous system and repair damage done by using stimulants. Whether you've stayed up one night or many, many nights, oats help heal the nerves you frazzled.

Passionflower *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower eases the nervous restlessness that usually accompanies quitting smoking, drinking or using. It quiets the mind, which can become unbearably chatty when we are used to quieting it by other means. Passionflower eases delirium tremens. It also helps restore sleep patterns disturbed by short or long term drug use.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap is another herb to turn to when quitting/taking a break from a substance we have come to depend on. Especially if quitting said substance is making us grouchy or twitchy. Skullcap also eases delirium tremens.

Substance Use & Recovery

Some of the following herbs are useful when attempting to quit using addictive substances while others address some of the side effects of substance use. Several of the herbs are indicated in the treatment of delirium tremens (the DTs), a form of alcoholic psychosis, including hallucinations and tremors, that is usually seen following withdrawal from heavy alcohol use. Warning: while these herbs can ease the DTs, please use caution. Alcohol withdrawal can kill. If you plan to withdraw from alcohol, please tell someone you trust. If the symptoms of withdrawal are severe, please go to the hospital.

Anemone/Pulsatilla *Anemone occidentalis*, *A. hirsutissima*, *A. tuberosa*, *A. quinquefolia*, *Pulsatilla spp.*

In low doses, anemone is a powerful antidote for negative emotional states that sometimes accompany the use of psychedelics. In other words, anemone eases the horror of the bad trip. Likewise, anemone soothes the anxiety and paranoia that can accompany the use of marijuana. Anemone slows and strengthens the pulse and respiration. Also, when tapering off pharmaceutical anxiolytics and anti-depressants, use anemone for its calming, grounding action while your body relearns self-regulation. Note: anemone isn't fun. It is EXTREMELY grounding but if you take too much you will feel bad, so take drop doses and don't take it recreationally.

Black cohosh *Actaea racemosa*

Black cohosh eases delirium tremens.

comfortable with them. We may not even remember what it is to live without these feelings. When we are stuck in thought patterns that no longer pertain to our situation, lavender helps clean out the mental trash, making room for new perspectives. Its refreshing energy clears mental fog and helps clarify thought. Hence, it's good for depression accompanied by difficulty thinking.

Lemon Balm *Melissa officianalis*

Lemon balm is a gentle but powerful herb. Simultaneously calming and uplifting, lemon balm elevates mood and has a generally brightening effect. During a particularly dark time in my life, I lost my ability to appreciate anything. Things that once brought me great joy had no effect. I had forgotten how to see beauty, how to experience joy. Lemon balm brightened my perception to pre-depression levels. It gave me the energy to make changes in my life and helped me appreciate the beauty around me. Lemon balm's brightening energy is also helpful for Seasonal Affective Disorder, the winter blues.

Rhodiola *Rhodiola rosea*

Rhodiola is an adaptogen that is stimulating to the central nervous system. As a CNS stimulant, rhodiola elevates mood and energizes in the short term. As an adaptogen, it helps us recover from stress and be less debilitated by stress in the long term. In other words, rhodiola is both good for dispelling a gloomy mood and for combating the effects of chronic long term depression when used regularly.

Rose *Rosa spp.*

This commonplace flower is a gentle anti-depressant. Like many other sweet smelling herbs, rose is calming and uplifting. Rose gently supports the brain and nervous system, helping us heal from emotional pain. It lifts the spirit and helps us prepare for change. Rose helps us remember how to experience joy when we have become accustomed to despair.

Rosemary *Rosmarinus officianalis*

Rosemary is best used in cases of depression accompanied by difficulty thinking. When despair leads to mental haze, rosemary cuts through the fog, helps clarify thought. When depression causes lethargy, rosemary gives us energy, helps us shake stagnant feelings and get moving.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap is helpful in cases of depression accompanied by anxiety, physical agitation, and/or an oversensitivity to stimuli. Its relaxing energy is calming when depression has an edgy, anxious component.

St. John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum*

St. John's wort has been used to treat despair at least since the Middle Ages. There has been a lot of hype around this herb for the past 20 years or so. I didn't try it myself for a long time because of this. I wasn't buying into any of the "herbal Prozac" business. However, I had a dramatic shift in thinking while harvesting St. John's wort for my apothecary. After picking the blossoms and flower buds for a couple of hours, my fingers stained purple from the blooms, I felt a sea change in my mood. This sounds miraculous, and in fact, it was. I had been stuck in a state of despair for months that I could not see my way out of. While harvesting St. John's wort, I felt an overwhelming change in my mood. I decided to give it a try and took the tincture for a couple of months. Now I can say from firsthand experience that St. John's wort is an amazingly effective herb for depression marked by stagnancy, in other words, stuck in a rut depression. When we are stuck, spinning our wheels, unable to make changes or see a way out, St. John's wort can help. It is helpful in cases of situational depression especially when circumstances have led a person to feel a loss of confidence. St. John's wort helps us learn to trust ourselves again after failure or a lapse in judgment. When things seem to be falling apart and you can't figure out how to pull them back together, try St. John's wort. This powerful herb is also useful when our lives have changed for the better but we are stuck in our old patterns of response. St. John's wort helps us see the improvement in our lives and helps us learn new ways to act and respond. St. John's wort blooms around the time of the summer solstice and its healing power feels solar, like taking sunshine internally. It is specific for Seasonal Affective Disorder. St. John's wort is also helpful for depression and discouragement in the elderly. While my flower picking miracle might suggest otherwise, St. John's wort doesn't always work right away. Sometimes it takes a few weeks to feel its effects, so stick with it if you don't notice any changes right away.

Depression Game-Changer: 2 parts tincture of St. John's wort, 1 part tincture of lemon balm, ½ part tincture of rose.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

Holy basil clears the mental fog that may accompany hormonal shifts during menopause.

Milky Oat Seed *Avena sativa*

Milky oat seed helps folks who feel emotionally frazzled and/or experience mood swings due to hormonal fluctuation. Oats ease pre-menstrual and menopausal anxiety and support us when we feel hyper-reactive to physical or emotional stress. Hormonal states that involve emotional outbursts, panic, exhaustion and a tendency to cry easily can be alleviated with milky oats.

Motherwort *Leonorus cardiaca*

Motherwort eases tension and anxiety associated with pre-menstrual, peri-menopausal, and menopausal hormonal shifts. It is helpful when our reactions are stronger than seems appropriate during these shifts. Extreme emotional states caused by hormonal fluctuations are eased by motherwort. It eases tension in the nerves and muscles. Motherwort is an excellent herb for post-partum depression as it helps normalize post-pregnancy hormone levels while supporting the mother emotionally.

Passionflower *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower helps stabilize mood during hormonal fluctuations. It helps with menopausal insomnia and is a good general nerve tonic during menopause.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap helps ease over-sensitivity and irritability that sometimes accompany hormonal flux. Skullcap also soothes post-partum depression and menopausal anxiety.

Valerian *Valeriana officianalis*

Valerian is a sedative that helps some folks with hormone-related dependency and anxiety. It is especially helpful when hormonal states are accompanied by restlessness and agitation.

menopause. Folks who take hormone therapy in the form of estrogen may experience similar symptoms. However, there may be interactions between these herbs and pharmaceutical hormones. If you take estrogen and would like to try some of these herbs, please do so under the supervision of an herbalist or an herb savvy physician.

Anemone/Pulsatilla *Anemone hirsutissima, A. tuberosa, A. occidentalis, A. quinquefolia, Pulsatilla spp.*

Anemone is a powerful, low-dose medicine. It is helpful for pre-menstrual, peri-menopausal and menopausal states that include extreme emotional instability. If you cannot quit crying or feel completely on edge, try anemone. It grounds us, pulling us immediately into the present, easing emotional upheaval that sometimes accompanies hormonal shifts.

Black Cohosh *Actaea racemosa*

Black cohosh alleviates irritability and mood swings that can accompany pre-menstrual, post-partum, and menopausal hormonal shifts. It also eases depression and despondency associated with these shifts. Black cohosh eases nervous tension and is specifically indicated for hormonal states marked by self-pity. It helps stabilize moods during menopause.

Blue Vervain *Verbena hastata*

Blue vervain is specific for folks with pre-menstrual, peri-menopausal or menopausal stress that puts them on edge. Irritable, snippy, quick-tempered, and angry states that accompany hormonal shifts call for blue vervain. If your hormonal state causes you to be overly critical of yourself or others (or, as is often the case, both) try blue vervain. It helps tone down the edginess, eases anxiety and nervous tension.

Chamomile *Matricaria recutita*

Chamomile is a gentle sedative that soothes pre-menstrual and menopausal anxiety and helps stabilize hormonal mood swings. Try chamomile for hormonal states that are marked by impatience, whininess and quarrelsomeness.

Grief TRAUMA

Grief is a state of deep mental anguish that is an emotional response to an external and consciously recognized loss.

Trauma is a type of damage to the psyche that occurs as a result of a severely distressing event or a repeating or enduring event. Traumatic events can overwhelm an individual's ability to cope or integrate the ideas and emotions associated with that experience. It is important to note that one person may experience an event as traumatic while another person may experience the same or same type of event and not exhibit symptoms of trauma.

A person who experiences trauma may develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a disorder characterized by recurring flashbacks, avoidance or numbing of memories of the traumatic event or events, and high levels of anxiety that occur for more than a month following the trauma.

I've included grief and trauma in the same section for several reasons. There is much overlap between the two states. Trauma is often accompanied by an intense sense of loss, be it the loss of a loved one, loss of self, loss of childhood, loss of hope, or some other loss. Likewise, grief, especially when brought on unexpectedly or when a series of grief-causing events happen in a row, can be a kind of trauma. Unresolved grief and the long-term effects of trauma settle in the body in similar ways.

Because of these overlaps, many of the herbs that support and ease the effects of trauma also relieve symptoms of grief.

Hawthorn *Crataegus spp.*

Hawthorn is nourishing and strengthening both to the physical and the metaphoric heart. Therefore, it is specific for all kinds of heartache: romantic break-ups, severed friendships, death of a loved one, grief over the state of the world. Hawthorn simultaneously heals heartache while strengthening the heart to make way for forgiveness and peace. It facilitates the opening of hearts suffering from recent and/or long past events. Hawthorn is helpful in the treatment of PTSD. It is an excellent adjunct to therapy, imparting a feeling of safety when exploring hurtful memories. As I mentioned in the hawthorn entry under depression, hawthorn is an ally to those of us who feel things so strongly we can hardly bear the day to day onslaught of bad news that engaging with the world so often entails. Hawthorn's healing power strengthens our hearts without toughening them. Hawthorn works better the longer you use it. It may take a while for the results to show, so be patient.

Holy Basil *Occimum sanctum*

When we experience a traumatic event and/or a great loss, we may become stuck, unable to stop thinking about it, unable to heal from the pain it has caused. Holy basil's refreshing effect helps us see in new ways and gives us the energy to move on. As an adaptogen, holy basil helps our bodies deal with emotional and physical stress. It repairs the damage of long term emotional pain as it helps us recover. Living with the effects of trauma and loss can leave us feeling overly full of emotion, unable to manage. Holy basil helps us move through old memories and strengthens us as we deal with everyday stressors.

Milky Oat Seed *Avena sativa*

The effects of living with trauma can leave us feeling fried, on edge, exhausted. Certain kinds of trauma and PTSD are accompanied by hyper-vigilance, in other words, having one's guard up even when there is no immediate threat. Milky oat seed tonifies and nourishes the nervous system, soothing and repairing frayed nerves. This restoration can help us

that accompanies chronic illness.

Valerian *Valeriana officianalis*

Valerian is a powerful sedative. When other herbs have failed, valerian has knocked me out. It is helpful for hormone-related insomnia during menopause or pregnancy. Valerian also eases insomnia caused by physical pain and/or emotional stress. Warning: Valerian is stimulating to some folks rather than calming. Try it first at a non-essential time in case it doesn't work.



The herbs in this section help ease the symptoms of hormonal stress. However, sometimes the underlying cause of this stress is the liver's inability to process the hormones that instigate and facilitate the menstrual cycle. If you have acne, oily skin, water retention, dry skin or constipation along with your emotional symptoms, you may be suffering from an inflamed or deficient liver. This may be due to food allergies, dietary choices, substance use, stress or just a constitutional trait. If herbal remedies only slightly ease your pre-menstrual or menopausal stress, you may want to speak to an herbalist and search for the root of the discomfort. A change in diet and a regime of liver support can ease symptoms that you may have taken for granted as a necessary part of menstruation or menopause.

A note on hormone therapy:

The following herbs are for people who experience mental discomfort or anguish as part of their menstrual cycle or approaching or during

tion. I like it in a tea with other calming herbs to help me wind down in the hour or so before I go to bed.

Hops *Humulus lupulus*

Hops is a strong, bitter sedative that is especially helpful for the insomnia that accompanies exhaustion due to mental, emotional or physical strain. Too tired to sleep? Try hops. Hops also eases the symptoms of over-stimulation.

Lemon Balm *Melissa officianalis*

Lemon balm is a gentle sedative. It helps calm the mind and is especially helpful for depression-related insomnia.

Milky Oat Seed *Avena sativa*

Milky oat seed is a gentle nervine that eases general insomnia. Specifically, oats help with insomnia associated with nervous exhaustion, dependency, and mental irritability. Oats nourish the nervous system freed from lack of sleep. Also, oats ease anxious, fearful states that prevent sleep, including the horrible anxiety that stems from fearing you won't be able to fall asleep, the insomnia snowball effect.

Mimosa tree *Albizia julibrissin*

Mimosa eases fear and prevents bad dreams. Thus it helps folks fall asleep and sleep through the night.

Passionflower *Passiflora incarnata*

Passionflower is the most effective herb for quieting the mind. It stops obsessive, circular thinking. For those who think too much, whose over-rumination staves off sleep, passionflower helps. When I don't even realize that I am keeping myself up with my own thoughts, passionflower turns down my inner chatter so I can sleep. Passionflower is also specific for insomnia accompanied by muscle twitching, alcohol-related insomnia and stress-induced insomnia.

Skullcap *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Skullcap is a sedative especially helpful for insomnia caused by over stimulation, over-excitement, or stress. It is also helpful in cases of insomnia

relax, let our guards down. If you are tense and afraid even in moments of down time, try milky oat seed.

Mimosa tree *Albizia julibrissin*

Also known as He Huan Pi, Collective Happiness Bark, in Chinese medicine, mimosa is an excellent herb in the treatment of both long-term unresolved grief and trauma. Like hawthorn, mimosa eases the pain of heartbreak, loss of loved ones and other states of intense grief. Mimosa eases the feeling of fear we encounter when facing past trauma or the pain of loss. It is useful in conjunction with therapy as it helps bring unresolved issues to the surface where we can examine them and integrate or move past them.

Peach leaf *Prunus persica*

Peach leaf is an old Southern remedy. According to Phyllis D. Light, Alabama herbalist, folks still take jars of peach leaf tea to the families of the recently deceased. Peach helps soothe the agitation of grief.

Rose *Rosa spp.*

This familiar herb is a powerful remedy for heartbreak, grief and for recovering from trauma. Its uplifting energy helps us open up to joy after we have been emotionally shut down by grief or trauma. Rose gently supports us as we heal and prepares us for change. Rose brightens our perspectives, dispelling the gloom left behind after loss. It is a heart opener, helping us give and receive love. Rose helps us integrate and release stressful experiences.

Heart healing formula: David Winston recommends combining hawthorn with rose and mimosa for the treatment of PTSD and long-term unresolved grief. He finds it especially useful as an adjunct to therapy as it helps the user feel safe feeling things more deeply, examining unresolved issues and moving from a place of pain to one of integration and balance. I have used this formula myself and can testify to the relief it brings, used with therapy and on its own. I have also given it to friends and clients suffering from everything from cataclysmic heartbreak to the death of a parent and seen it work wonders. I've seen this formula help folks recover from the effects of trauma and PTSD. It is an amazing ally

in healing from emotional pain. I no longer take it regularly, but when that thin-skinned, crying easily feeling comes back, I take this combination for a few days and head off the emotional crash. I use 2.5 parts each of hawthorn and mimosa tinctures to one part of rose. Other folks use different proportions with similar effects.

A note on grief: Grief, as defined above, is a normal response to loss. The newest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the DSM V), the standard clinician's reference for diagnosing mental disorders, labels grief that persists longer than six weeks after the death of a loved one pathological. Even if the grief refers to the death of a partner, parent or child. Six weeks. The inclusion of this arbitrary and cruel timeline is directly influenced by pharmaceutical companies, who take part in writing this manual that defines and categorizes mental illness, and who benefit from more people being declared sick. However, this time frame also points to a fundamental lack in our culture to acknowledge or make space for grief. Even 50 years ago, it was customary to publicly mourn for a full year after the death of a partner or family member. Where is the space for our grief? Why must we rush to recover? Grief is part of being alive, part of having relationships. It is a necessary risk of connection, for to love someone is to risk losing them. The herbs in the above section do not numb or annihilate grief but support us as we move through that necessary process, helping to insure that we don't get stuck there.

INSOMNIA

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Ashwagandha works best as a tonic for insomnia. While it does have a sedative effect, it works best taken daily over an extended period of time. It strengthens the body and mind weakened by habitual loss of sleep. Ashwagandha is especially helpful for insomnia stemming from stress and anxiety or from depression.

Black Cohosh *Actaea racemosa*

Black cohosh is specific for insomnia accompanied by or caused by muscle pain. It is useful for treating menopausal and peri-menopausal insomnia. Black cohosh also eases insomnia that sometimes accompanies dark, brooding forms of depression.

California Poppy *Eschscholzia californica*

California poppy is a mild sedative that normalizes sleep patterns. It helps folks who have trouble falling asleep, who wake up in the night and can't go back to sleep and/or those who wake up too early. It is also helpful in cases of insomnia that stem from physical pain.

Chamomile *Matricaria recutita*

Chamomile is a gentle sedative. It has been traditionally used by cultures all over the world to soothe and calm grouchy children. Likewise, it helps adults who feel whiny and grouchy. Chamomile soothes the stomach and is therefore also good for insomnia accompanied by indiges-