



B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

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This week...

Finding your zzzzzzz's with Natural Help

Ahhhh sleep! A good, fulfilling night's sleep is an elusive gift for many of us. Sleep quality and quantity seem to be at an all-time low, with more and more of our members experiencing poor sleep!

Good sleep normally starts with healthy pre-sleep habits, but even with a solid pre-bed routine, I still have trouble getting a restful night of slumber. I didn't want to rely on prescription sleep aids as they can be habit-forming, can have side effects, and can even be detrimental to your health if used for long periods of time.

I ended up finding relief through natural supplements which helped calm my nervous system and enabled me to stay asleep for longer periods of time, and to sleep more deeply.

If you have a hard time falling asleep and staying asleep, or you wake up tired, perhaps one of these natural supplements may help you.

As always, we provide this information for educational purposes only. Always check with your health care practitioner or team before taking any supplements, as some may interfere with certain health conditions or prescription medications.

As well, remember that herbal supplements are not regulated like prescription meds. Please do your own online research if any of the supplements listed below are of interest. The next step would be to speak to a naturopath, pharmacist, or knowledgeable staff in a health store who can help you find quality products and the right dosage.

Here are some supplements to consider:

Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone your body produces naturally; it signals to your brain – in response to darkness – that it's time to sleep. The production and release of this hormone is influenced by time of day: levels naturally rise in the evening and fall in the morning.

Melatonin is not a sedative. It improves sleep by **helping to strengthen the body's sleep-wake cycles**. That is why it is commonly used for jet lag and for those doing shift work.

According to research, melatonin can shorten the time it takes to fall asleep, increase overall volume of sleep, and reduce daytime sleepiness or fatigue. Studies also show melatonin may **increase REM sleep** where we consolidate and process memory and prime the regions of the brain associated with learning.

Magnesium

Magnesium is a mineral involved in numerous processes in the human body, and it's important for brain function and heart health. Getting sufficient magnesium helps the body maintain healthy levels of GABA (Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid), a neurotransmitter that promotes sleep, and elevates and stabilizes mood.

Magnesium helps regulate the body's biological clock and levels of melatonin; low levels of magnesium are linked to low levels of melatonin. Ensuring that the body has the sufficient levels magnesium can support sleep health, research indicates supplemental magnesium can **improve sleep quality**, especially in people who sleep poorly. It can also help alleviate insomnia that's linked to the sleep disorder **restless-leg syndrome**. One study found that a combination of magnesium, melatonin, and vitamin B was effective in treating insomnia regardless of the cause.

This mineral is known to relax muscles which may help quiet the mind and body making it easier to sleep and helping with symptoms of both **mild-to-moderate anxiety** and **mild-to-moderate depression**.

Valerian and Hops

The combination of valerian and hops is a herbal combination used as a supplement for sleep and stress relief. Valerian is an herb native to Asia and Europe; its root has an ancient history as a natural treatment for symptoms of anxiety, depression, and menopause. The flowers of the hop plant are typically used to make beer, but they have also been used for centuries to treat sleep and anxiety.

Both valerian and hops help to boost production of GABA, a calming brain chemical that promotes sleep. Valerian appears to function primarily as an anxiolytic — an anxiety reducer. Valerian has been shown to help people **fall asleep more quickly**, reduce restless sleep, increase sleep amounts, and improve symptoms of insomnia. Research also shows valerian is effective in treating **sleep problems linked to menopause**. Hops have sedative properties and therapeutic doses of this plant can lower body temperature, which contributes to drowsiness. Hops can also increase the volume of sleep you get.

Both can be taken separately or together. Studies show these herbal supplements pair well together: according to research, **hops may be more effective for sleep when in combination with valerian**.

Magnolia Bark

The bark of the magnolia tree has long been used in traditional medicine to treat sleep issues, protect memory, reduce stress, help with digestive problems, and support weight loss. It is packed with potent natural compounds that have been shown to reduce inflammation, lower anxiety, and improve symptoms of depression. Improving these conditions can indirectly help sleep.

Magnolia bark also acts as a sedative, providing direct benefits for sleep. Bioactive compounds in magnolia bark appear to help increase time in both slow wave sleep and REM sleep. Other compounds found in magnolia bark can lower the levels of stimulating hormones like adrenaline and cortisol.

5-HTP – a serotonin booster

5-Hydroxytryptophan — commonly known as 5-HTP — is a compound made naturally in the body. 5-HTP is created as a by-product of the amino acid L-tryptophan. Our bodies do not make L-tryptophan naturally; we absorb this essential amino acid from the foods we eat.

This compound helps the body to **produce more serotonin**, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood and sleep-wake cycles. Research shows 5-HTP may help shorten the time it takes to fall asleep and increase **sleep volume**. 5-HTP can be effective in improving mood and easing symptoms of stress and anxiety. 5-HTP may also be effective in helping to reduce **sleep terrors** in children.

Glycine

Glycine is an amino acid and a neurotransmitter. The body produces glycine on its own, synthesized from other natural biochemicals. We also consume glycine through food, and it is found in high-protein foods including meat, fish, eggs, dairy, and legumes. A daily diet typically includes about 2 grams of glycine.

Glycine is considered among the most important amino acids for the body. It has a widespread influence over our bodies' systems, structure, and general health, including cardiovascular, cognitive, and metabolic health. **Glycine helps the body make serotonin**, which we have already mentioned has significant effect on sleep and mood.

Glycine can improve symptoms of insomnia and can help you **bounce back to healthy sleep cycles after a period of disrupted sleep**. A recent study of the effects of glycine as a supplement showed it triggered a drop in body temperature and at the same time helped people both fall asleep more quickly and spend more time in REM sleep. Glycine may help you **move more quickly into deep, slow wave sleep**.

Ashwagandha

Ashwagandha, also known as Indian ginseng and winter cherry, is a common herbal medicine used in traditional Ayurveda health practices. Ashwagandha is considered an adaptogen, a term that describes a group of herbs that are said to protect the body and might be effective at fighting stress.

Preliminary research has found that ashwagandha may help people fall asleep faster, spend more time asleep, and experience better sleep quality. Several compounds in it may be responsible for these sleep-promoting effects. Researchers have proposed that the triethylene glycol naturally present in the herb may bring on sleepiness. Other researchers propose that ashwagandha acts on GABA receptors, which are a key part of the sleep-wake circuit.

Ashwagandha's main active ingredients are withanolides, which are believed to carry a host of benefits including the ability to ease stress. If taking ashwagandha before bed helps you relax, this may be another way by which it promotes better sleep.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rochelle', with a stylized flourish at the end.

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources

Healthline | [9 Natural Sleep Aids That May Help You Get Some Shut-Eye](#)

Sleep Health Solutions | [Health Effects of Long-Term Sleeping Pill Use](#)

Sleep Foundation | [Ashwagandha for Sleep](#)

The Sleep Doctor | [10 Of The Most Effective Natural Sleep Aids](#)