

Anxiety?

Try the Power of *Passionflower*

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Tightening of the chest, sweaty palms, heart palpitations: we all know the effects anxiety can have on us. For many people, anxiety is a constant companion, arising in situations as diverse as flying, writing exams, or going for a job interview. Current pharmaceutical treatments for anxiety – including benzodiazepines such as clonazepam, lorazepam, oxazepam etc – can have side effects including drowsiness, decreased concentration, and even behavioural changes. In addition, people become tolerant to these medications over time, leading to increased dosages or withdrawal symptoms to get back to square one: living with anxiety.

Several herbs claim to be useful for anxiety and stress, but one of the best studied is passionflower. Passionflower is an herb which has recently been featured on shows such as Dr. Oz for improving symptoms of stress and anxiety, for breaking the stress cycle. Where did this come from? Why haven't North Americans heard more about passionflower and its benefits?

Passionflower for Anxiety

Passionflower – particularly the species known as *Passiflora incarnata* – is a flowering plant native to the southern US, Bermudas, and tropical Asia. It has long been used as a medicinal plant in traditional medicine for sleep disorders, anxiety states, and nervousness. In Europe, there are a number of passionflower products on the market. In Canada most products which contain passionflower use it as one of many ingredients, not on its own. However, on its own passionflower is a very powerful, well-

tolerated, and well-researched herb for treating stress and anxiety.

Passionflower can be used successfully to treat acute anxiety (associated with things like fear of flying, pressure at work, exam anxiety, panic attacks) as well as more long-term anxiety (such as chronic stress). As stress and anxiety can have major impacts on other aspects of health, it is important to have a safe, effective natural therapy such as passionflower to treat these conditions.

Studies on Passionflower

A 2001 double-blind, randomized study found that passionflower was equal in effectiveness to oxazepam (a prescription anti-anxiety medication). Passionflower had a quicker onset of action, fewer side effects, and no impairment of work performance as compared with oxazepam.¹

Another double-blind, randomized study also found that passionflower had equal effectiveness on anxiety with fewer side effects than another prescription anxiety medication, mexazolam.²

A third double-blind, placebo-controlled study found that patients given a single dose of passionflower before surgery had significantly less anxiety but no adverse sedative effects.³

While there is also at least one study which shows that passionflower can be used successfully to treat ADHD⁴ – its effect has been shown to be as good as Ritalin – there is not yet enough evidence to recommend its use in children under 13.



The European Medicines Agency evaluated passionflower for safety in 2008 and found that it is quite safe, with only very rare reports of hypersensitivity (allergic reactions). In

Britain, passionflower is indicated for sleep disorders, restlessness, nervous stress, and anxiety.

Passionflower works quickly and can therefore be used just before an acute situation: right before a flight, an interview, an exam, or public speaking engagement. And with no impact on your ability to concentrate, you don't have to fear any negative effects which would stop you from performing at your best. Passionflower can also be taken over time for chronic stress and anxiety, as seen in the studies on generalized anxiety.

What to Look For in Passionflower

Always ensure that you are taking *Passiflora incarnata* – this particular species seems to have the

most powerful anxiety-relieving effects. Be sure also that it is an alcohol extract of the aerial parts of the plant, which has the greatest effectiveness. Both sets of information should be clearly marked on the box. A dose of around 400mg-500mg as needed is ideal, or you can take it twice daily for longer-term effects.

The next time you have that anxious feeling take a deep breath: and reach for passionflower.

Benefits of Passionflower

- well-studied for treating generalized anxiety
- very safe and well-tolerated
- can be used to improve sleep, nervousness, and other symptoms of stress
- works quickly for acute anxiety

References

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