

### **About Ashwagandha**

Ashwagandha has a reputation as a strong and sure immune tonic and stress protector, rivaling ginseng in the few clinical trials conducted. It has a millennia-long tradition of use in Northern Africa, India, and portions of Asia. One of its strengths is its sure and reliable action as a nerve sedative. For people who are highly stressed, the herb gently lowers stress levels in the body, protects the body from stress-related disease, and brings the immune system up to optimum levels of activity. As with most immune tonics (as opposed to immune stimulants like echinacea), the herb works best over time. Like Siberian ginseng, it will take 6 weeks to 6 months to get a good sense whether the herb will work for you.

Two other *Withania* species are used in much the same manner: *W. obtusifolia* and *W. coagulans*. *W. obtusifolia* has a long history of use in the Sudan, and *W. coagulans* (especially the fruit) has long been used in Pakistan and India. *W. coagulans* is so termed because it is a powerful coagulating agent and is used in place of rennet by Indians to make cheese.

#### **A Ginseng Substitute**

Similar in its effects to ginseng, ashwagandha is much cheaper, not yet being an "herb-of-the-day" in the West.

### **Preparation and Dosage**

Ashwagandha is available almost exclusively through larger health food stores. Prepare powdered root as single or double-ought capsules; taken 1 to 6 per day.

### **Side Effects and Contraindications**

Used in India as an abortifacient. Not suggested for use during pregnancy. The root and leaves are considered narcotic, as are many members of the *Solanaceae* family; the seeds are considered a hypnotic narcotic. Caution is suggested in ingesting large doses. However, the record of folk use indicates that the narcotic effects of the herb are not nearly as strong as those of its cousin henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) and are slightly stronger than those of its relative dulcamara (*Solanum dulcamara*). The plant is fairly high in nicotine, so those trying to quit smoking may find that this herb makes that task more difficult.