

THE NATURAL PATH

Your Guide to Good Health & Vitality
Cutting Edge Research Made Easy

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Mushrooms & Mental Health

THE NEW FRONTIER IN MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS IS MENTAL HEALTH

There is an ancient and venerable tradition of mushrooms being used medicinally for the body and, particularly, immunity. But emerging research is opening up a new frontier: mushrooms for the mind. Increasingly, recent research is pointing to mushrooms being as important for mental health as they are for physical health.

There are several mushrooms with long histories of celebrated use. Reishi's physical health importance is reflected in one of its traditional Chinese names: plant of immortality. Its psychological importance is hinted at in another of its traditional names: spirit plant. Reishi has been used for immunity, including cancer, AIDS, chronic fatigue syndrome and respiratory disease. It is also an important herb for blood pressure and other heart and circulatory conditions. But reishi has also been used for its psychological powers for insomnia, anxiety and for calming the nerves while revitalizing them.

Maitake was so celebrated in traditional medicine that its name means dancing mushroom, presumably for the dance you did when you came upon one. Maitake has been accumulating an impressive body of research as a herb for cancer.

Shiitake is a very special mushroom whose powerful immune

LOOK INSIDE

- Herbs Versus Drugs for Influenza
- Grow Your Hair with Saw Palmetto
- Herbs for Liver Health
- Dark Chocolate for a Long Life

Continued on Page 4

Surprising New Menopause Supplements



THERE IS AN EXPLOSION OF EXCITING NEW RESEARCH ON NATURAL SUPPLEMENTS FOR MENOPAUSE

There are all kinds of effective supplements that help women going through menopause. Some of the best known are black cohosh, chastetree berry, soy isoflavones, hops, fennel, fenugreek, schizandra and valerian.

New Herbs for Menopause

Others are newer. Saffron has been shown to help both hot flashes (*Arch Gynecol Obstet* 2018;297(3):717-724) and the anxiety and depression that can accompany menopause (*J Menopausal Med* 2021;27(2):66-78). Combining saffron with fennel and chamomile is way better than placebo for both physical and psychological symptoms (*J Caring Sci September* 2019;8(3):181-9).

Some herbs have surprised. Milk thistle is the greatest of all the liver herbs. Turns out, it's great for menopause too. Taking 400mg of milk thistle standardized for 80% silymarin twice a day for 8 weeks significantly decreases the frequency and severity of hot flashes (*Phytother Res.* 2020;34(12):3359-3366).

Traditional Persian medicine has long used pomegranate to help women with menopause. Now, double-blind research confirms that pomegranate brings about significant improvement on the modified-Kupperman index and Menopause-Specific Quality of Life questionnaires (*Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice February* 2022;46:101544).

New research also shows that combining some well-established menopause herbs leads to amazing results. Individually, each of

Continued on Page 2



LIFESAVER: STRESSED? ADAPTOGENS TO THE RESCUE!

This new double-blind study compared 2 adaptogens to placebo for stress. The first was a combo of rhodiola, schisandra and holy basil, and the second was ashwagandha. Both worked. Both adaptogens reduced stress significantly better than placebo. They were both also significantly better than placebo for sleep quality, restorative sleep and anxiety (*Trials.* 2026 Feb 9. doi:10.1186/s13063-026-09495-9).



Surprising New Menopause Supplements



from Page 1

black cohosh, soy isoflavones and lignans like the ones found in flaxseeds, have been proven to help women with menopause. A new double-blind study examined what happens when you put them together. 90 postmenopausal women were given either a placebo or the combination supplement for 90 days with symptoms being assessed on the Menopause Rating Index. Significant improvement was seen in the supplement group compared to the placebo in every domain, including a 54.3% difference in physical symptoms, a 54.3% difference in psychological symptoms, a 37.3% difference in urogenital symptoms and a 48% difference in total score (*Eur J Nutr.* 2025;64:138).

The Latest Research

While black cohosh effectively dropped scores on the Kupperman Menopausal Index by 50.5-59.1%, combining it with rhodiola dropped it by 71.2% versus only 26.3% on placebo. The herbal combo improved quality of life by 25% versus 12.2% on placebo (*Pharmaceuticals* 2020 May;13(5):102).

A new study builds on previous research that showed that ashwagandha root extract significantly reduces the number of hot flashes and night sweats while significantly improving psychological symptoms (*J Obstet Gynaecol Res.* 2021;47(12):4414-25).

The just published 56 day, double-blind study compared 300mg of ashwagandha root extract taken twice a day with a placebo in 60 healthy menopausal women. The primary outcome measured was improvement on the Menopause Rating Scale. While the women on placebo improved from a score of 30.73 to 30.03, the women on ashwagandha improved from 31.37 to 18.53. Ashwagandha produced significant improvement on all subscales, including psychological, physical and urogenital.

Ashwagandha was superior for balancing hormones and, while hot flashes did not significantly improve in either group, they improved significantly and consistently more in the ashwagandha group.

Quality of life related to health improved significantly more in the ashwagandha group. There was also significantly greater improvement on the Perceived Stress Scale (*Front Reprod Health.* 2026 Jan 5;7:1647721).

Better known for men, a new double-blind study shows that *tongkat ali* is great

for women too. The study gave women with menopausal symptoms placebo or 100mg of *tongkat ali* extract for 12 weeks. On a scale of menopausal quality of life, total score improved significantly more in the *tongkat ali* group: the *tongkat ali* group improved by 33.9% versus 23.3%. The herb group had a significantly greater improvement in the physical and sexual domains.

Women taking *tongkat ali* had a 33.4% improvement in hot flashes and night sweats, a 36.4% improvement in physical symptoms, a 36.3% improvement in sexual symptoms and a 26.8% improvement in psychological symptoms.

On the POMS assessment of psychological symptoms, total score improved more in the *tongkat ali*. Tension improved by 21.7%, depression by 31.9%, anger by 13.8%, fatigue by 36.9%, confusion by 20.5% and vigor by 5.7% (*World J Clin Cases.* 2025 Nov 6;13(31):109113).

It is well known that most menopausal women suffer from hot flashes. It is less well known that a third to a half of them suffer from sleep disturbances too.

Recently, there has been a surprising blossoming of new research on menopause



and insomnia. An unexpected study found that basil extract helps menopausal insomnia (*Phytother Res.* 2023 Feb 7. doi:10.1002/ptr.7753). Another unexpected study found that vitamin E, in the form of mixed tocopherols, also helps menopausal insomnia (*Nutrients.* 2023 Mar;15(5):1187).

Now a new study has found that a herbal combo helps both menopausal insomnia and hot flashes. 76 postmenopausal women were given either a placebo or 500mg of a fennel-valerian combination twice a day for 8 weeks. The women in the fennel-valerian group had significantly fewer and less severe hot flashes than the placebo group, and they had significantly better scores on the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (*J Menopausal Med.* 2023 Apr;29(1):21-28).

Unexpectedly, there has been a recent flurry of studies demonstrating the benefits of asparagus root extract for menopause. *Asparagus racemosus*, or wild asparagus, is in the same family as, but distinct from, the *Asparagus officinalis* that we eat. In traditional herbalism, the most valued part of the plant is the root, which is known in the traditional Ayurvedic system of healing as shatavari.

In 2024, a double-blind study (*Cureus.* April 8, 2024;16(4):e57879) gave women who were

either perimenopausal or menopausal a placebo or 250mg twice a day of asparagus root extract standardized for no less than 5% shatavarins for 60 days.

The women taking the asparagus root had significantly fewer hot flashes and night sweats than the women taking the placebo. They also fared significantly better in urinary incontinence, fatigue, sleep problems, mood swings and loss of libido.

The asparagus group did significantly better in total score on a menopause quality of life scale (UQoL), as well as in all domain scores, including occupational, health, emotional, and sexual UQoL scores. They also did significantly better on a scale of depression, anxiety and stress (DASS-21). And they slept better. On the Regensburg Insomnia Scale, the women on asparagus root had better total scores, as well as deep sleep, quality of sleep and daytime functioning.

In a second double-blind study (*Functional Foods in Health and Disease* 2025;15(7):415-443), perimenopausal women were given 100mg of an extract standardized to 15% shatavarins for 120 days. Improvement on the Menopausal Rating Scale was significantly better on asparagus root. Total score was reduced by 22.8% in the placebo group but by a significantly better 73% in the asparagus group.

Menstrual Symptom Questionnaire Scores improved by 36% in the placebo group and by 178.8% in the asparagus group. While hot flashes were reduced by 7.76% in the placebo group, they dropped by 39.81 on asparagus.

In a third study (*J Am Nutr Assoc.* 2025 May 28;1-11), perimenopausal women were given either a placebo or 200mg a day of asparagus root extract for 120 days. Once again, total scores in the asparagus group improved significantly more on the Menopausal Rating Scale and on the Hot Flash Weekly Weighted Score.

In the latest double-blind study, perimenopausal women were given a placebo or 300mg of shatavari root extract for 8 weeks. Once again, the shatavari proved itself. Improvement on both the Menopause Rating Scale and the Menopause-Specific Quality of Life Questionnaire were significantly greater in the asparagus group. Hot flash frequency was reduced significantly more on the shatavari. Estradiol, follicle-stimulating hormone and triiodothyronine were significantly better in the herb group.

On the Profile of Mood States, fatigue scores were significantly more improved in the asparagus group, and on the Perceived Stress Scale, there were significantly greater reductions on the shatavari (*Int J Womens Health.* November 3, 2025;17:4057-4073).



Spotlight: Echinacea & Elderberry Take on Tamiflu

It's been a nasty flu season this year. So, you may want to take a close look at this study.

This double-blind study compared one of the gold standard pharmaceutical treatments for influenza with one of the gold standard herbal treatments.

420 people with early influenza symptoms were given either oseltamivir (*Tamiflu*) or a combination of echinacea and elderberry. Their most common symptom was cough followed by headache, muscle pain and fever.

By day 10, 90.1% of the herbal group and 84.8% of the drug group were better.

In people whose influenza had been confirmed by nasal

samples, the advantage for the herbs was 95% versus 76.2%.

Complications from the flu are frequent and important. In this study, 6.5% of the *Tamiflu* group experienced complications, including pneumonia, bronchitis and sinusitis while only 2.5% of the *echinacea/elderberry* group did.

As a bonus, the herbs were also safer than the drugs. While there were no serious side effects in either group, there were slightly more adverse events in the drug group, and more people had to stop taking the drug. In particular, nausea and vomiting were 5 times more frequent in the drug group.

This study suggests that a combination of echinacea

and elderberry may be more effective than oseltamivir (*Tamiflu*) for influenza.

Curr Ther Res Clin Exp. 2015 Apr 20;77:66–72.



Photo by Ted Shilder



NATURAL PATH NEWSFLASH



Grow Your Hair With Saw Palmetto

This new double-blind study of men and women with thinning hair found that 6 months of saw palmetto berry led to a significant 154% greater improvement in terminal hair count (*the thick kind of hair found on your scalp*) and a 192% greater improvement in hair density in men.

In menopausal women, the saw palmetto led to significant 312% greater improvement in terminal hair count and a 230% greater improvement in hair density.

Hair width (*thickness*) also significantly improved more in men and women with saw palmetto.

J Cosmet Dermatol. 2026 Feb 6;25(2):e70717.

Combo of Traditional Liver Herbs Improves Liver Enzymes

This study combined four traditional liver herbs: milk thistle, dandelion, turmeric and ginger.

Compared to placebo, improvements in all four liver enzymes, ALT, AST, ALP, and GGT were significantly greater when the herbs were given to people with normal liver function.

Liver fibrosis (*APRI*) also improved significantly more on the herbs, as did cholesterol and markers of inflammation.

Front. Nutr. 12:1721748.

Ageless!



Theobromine From Chocolate Slows Biological Aging

Theobromine is a not enough studied alkaloid found in chocolate. This study found that theobromine is associated with slower biological aging, including a strong predictor of time to death and telomere length.

This exiting (*and delicious*) study may help explain why eating dark chocolate is associated a 47% reduced risk of premature death from any cause (*Arch Intern Med* 2006;166:411-417).

Aging (Albany NY). 2025 Dec 10; 17:2902-2915.





from Page 1

boosting substances make it one of the most exciting remedies for any condition involving lowered immunity and an exciting natural treatment for cancer.

Recently, mushrooms have been featured in a number of exciting studies on mental health.



Reishi's traditional use as a remedy for mental health was put to the scientific test in 1374 cancer patients. It found that taking reishi improved nausea and poor appetite. But it also found that it improved fatigue and depression (*Integr Med Res.* 2024 Sep 30;13(4):101089). A previous study of cancer patients also found that reishi improved depression and anxiety (*Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.* 2012;2012:809614).

Lion's mane is another mushroom that has recently enjoyed encouraging mental health research. A 28-day, double-blind study found a strong trend that was just shy of statistical significance for reduced stress (*Nutrients.* 2023 Nov 20;15(22):4842).

People who are overweight have an increases risk of mood disorders. But a study of overweight people with mood or sleep disorders found that 8 weeks of supplementing lion's mane improved depression, anxiety and sleep disorders (*Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.* 2019 Apr 18;2019:7861297).

One of the most important components of mushrooms is β -glucan, which activates white blood cells to help your immune system fight off invading organisms. Children with autism are prone to poor sleep quality. A recent pilot study that showed β -glucan improves sleep in kids

with autism surprisingly also found that β -glucan increases melatonin (*Brain Behav.* 2022 Sep;12(9):e2750).

A just published meta-analysis of 12 controlled studies on the effect of β -glucan on fatigue in healthy people found a significant reduction in fatigue and a significant increase in vigour and mood compared to placebo (*Eur J Clin Nutr.* 2025 Aug;79(8):705-714).

The Best News Yet

But a recently published study of mushrooms and mental health may be the most exciting yet.

The supplement in this study was a combination of powerful mushrooms: shiitake, maitake, reishi, lion's mane and cordyceps. The people in the double-blind study all had at least 3 stress related symptoms. Each of the 50 people in the study was given 1g a day of the supplement for 12 weeks. The mushroom supplement was standardized for at least 30% β -glucan and at least 30% total polysaccharides.

The mushrooms helped with all of anxiety, depression and stress. They led to a 33.5% improvement in anxiety on the Hamilton



Photo by Ted Snider

Anxiety Scale compared to a significantly inferior 13.1% in the placebo group. The Beck Depression Inventory revealed a 16.8% improvement in the mushroom group while the placebo group worsened by 4.1%. According to the Perceived Stress Scale, stress went down by 10.1% on placebo, but by a significantly greater 17.8% on the mushrooms. Already by week 6, the

mushrooms were significantly better for anxiety, depression and stress than the placebo.

The main thing the study wanted to see was what effect the mushrooms would have on stress reduction as measured by changes in cortisol levels. While cortisol went down by 0.8% in the placebo group, it went down by a significantly greater 5.5% in the mushroom group.

When faced with stress, the pituitary hormone ACTH triggers the production of cortisol. While ACTH levels went down by 0.2% in the placebo group, they went down by a significantly greater 8.1% in the mushroom group.

But that's not all. The mushrooms improved physical fatigue by 9.2% versus a significantly less impressive 2.1% in the placebo group. When it came to sleep, overall sleep quality worsened slightly in the placebo group by 0.4%, but it improved by a significantly greater 6.4% in the mushroom group.

The mushrooms gave all this benefit with no risk. All safety parameters, including liver function, kidney function, hematological indices, electrolyte levels, and blood glucose levels remained normal on the mushrooms (*Brain Behav.* 2026 Jan 15;16(1):e71193).



Photo by Ted Snider

This impressive new study adds to the already existing evidence that mushrooms, better known for their immune benefits, also have mental health benefits.

About Linda Woolven & Ted Snider



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