

PRESS RELEASE
ISSUED 7th November 2018

The NIMH supports International Stress Awareness Day

Members of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists will be participating in International Stress Awareness Day on 7th November 2018. Statistics produced by the United Kingdom government agency the Health & Safety Executive reveal that stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 15.4 million work days lost due to work-related ill health, which has a significant effect on the country's productivity.¹ Long term or chronic stress can affect all the body systems, including the skin, hormones, cardiovascular system, immune system and the nervous system.

Stress can affect all genders and age groups. Symptoms of stress include:

- Fatigue
- Muscular tension
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia
- Gastrointestinal upsets, such as diarrhoea or constipation
- Dermatological disorders

Herbal medicine has much to offer when a person is suffering from stress or stress-related conditions. A medical herbalist takes a holistic approach to healthcare and is able to offer advice and support on dietary and lifestyle matters. When putting together an individual formula for their patient, a medical herbalist might include one of the following herbs commonly used to treat the following conditions:

- **Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)** has a long history of use for alleviating anxiety and insomnia. A recent randomised study has shown that it can elevate mood. This western herb was found to be effective in enhancing mood without having a negative effect on cognition or energy levels.² Another placebo controlled study also shows it to reduce anxiety.³
- **Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*)** belongs to a group of herbs known as adaptogens - herbs which help the human body adapt to stress and support normal metabolic processes. The term adaptogen was coined by the Russian physician and pharmacologist Nicholai Lazarev. Lazarev categorised as adaptogen those plants that improve non specific resistance to all kinds of stressors by helping the organism to adapt or adjust to changes in the environment. Other traditional uses of ashwaganda include treatment for headaches, insomnia, anxiety and to promote learning and memory. A randomised controlled trial showed that ashwaganda safely and effectively improved resistance towards stress and improved self-assessed quality of life.⁴ Another study suggested that ashwaganda can help prevent stress-related weight gain compared to placebo.⁵
- **Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)** has traditionally been used for a wide variety of conditions, including anxiety, stress and insomnia as well as gastrointestinal complaints. Modern research backs up its use for anxiety, insomnia and dyspepsia. Preliminary clinical research found that lemon balm increased calmness and alertness in adults during a stress test.⁶

The NIMH always recommends consulting a qualified medical herbalist for support and advice with health problems. Your nearest NIMH herbalist can be found here: <https://www.nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/>

¹<http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/dayslost.htm>

²Brock C, Whitehouse J, Tewfik I, Towell T. American Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*): a randomised, double-blind placebo-controlled crossover study of its effects on mood in healthy volunteers. *Phytother Res.* 2014 May;28(5):692-8.

³Wolfson, P. and Hoffmann, D.L., 2003. An investigation into the efficacy of *Scutellaria lateriflora* in healthy volunteers. *Alternative therapies in health & medicine*, 9(2).

⁴Chandrasekhar, K., Kapoor, J. and Anishetty, S., 2012. A prospective, randomized double-blind, placebo-controlled study of safety and efficacy of a high-concentration full-spectrum extract of ashwagandha root in reducing stress and anxiety in adults. *Indian journal of psychological medicine*, 34(3), p.255.

⁵Choudhary D, Bhattacharyya S, Joshi K. Body weight management in adults under chronic stress through treatment with ashwagandha root extract: a double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial. *J Evid Based Complementary Altern Med.* 2017 Jan;22(1):96-106

⁶Kennedy DO, Little W, Scholey AB. Attenuation of laboratory-induced stress in humans after acute administration of *Melissa officinalis* (Lemon Balm). *Psychosom Med.* 2004 Jul-Aug;66:607-13

More about Stress Awareness Week 5th – 9th November

The week is organised by the International Stress Management Association – a leading charity with offices in London. During 2018 ISMA published results of a survey on '[Workplace Stress and Automation](https://isma.org.uk/national-stress-awareness-day)' see <https://isma.org.uk/national-stress-awareness-day>

INFORMATION FOR EDITORS

More about the NIMH

The National Institute of Medical Herbalists is the UK's leading professional body representing herbal medicine practitioners.

First established as the National Association of Medical Herbalists in 1864, today the National Institute of Medical Herbalists has more than 600 members across the UK and beyond.

The Institute promotes the benefits of herbal medicine and oversees the provision of the best patient care through the work of its members.

NIMH members undergo a lengthy training programme before they can register as qualified medical herbalists. Practitioners train for at least three years before they can gain MNIMH or FNIMH after their name. Recently qualified practitioners will have taken a BSc in Phytotherapy (herbal medicine). All NIMH-registered herbalists are fully insured, and follow a strict code of conduct.

NIMH-registered medical herbalists are trained in the same diagnostic skills as mainstream doctors but take a more holistic approach to treating illness. Herbalists treat a wide range of acute and chronic conditions and frequently work in collaboration with GPs and consultants to achieve the best combination of treatments for individual patients.

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