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## Health Benefits of Ashwagandha Or Indian Ginseng

Ashwagandha, also known as Indian Ginseng, has a wide range of health benefits, including its ability to fight against cancer and diabetes, as well as reduce inflammation, arthritis, asthma, hypertension, stress, and rheumatism.



Furthermore, it boosts your supply of antioxidants and regulates the immune system. It also has antibacterial and anticonvulsant properties.

Ashwagandha has had a great significance in Oriental medical schools of thought, especially in the ancient Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda, for many centuries. It had also been used by Native Americans and Africans in effort to keep away several types of infections. Extensive scriptures describing the Ashwagandha plant and its medicinal properties have been mentioned in both traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda.

### What Is Ashwagandha (Indian Ginseng)?

Ashwagandha belongs to the *Solanaceae* family and its scientific name is *Withania somnifera*. It is also known as Indian ginseng or winter cherry. In Sanskrit, it is known by the name Ashwagandha, which means the odor of a horse. It is named so because of the odor of horse sweat that the roots seem to emanate. The plant originated from India and it grows best in dry regions. It is a robust plant that can survive very high temperatures and low temperatures, ranging from 40°C to as low as 10°C. Ashwagandha grows from sea level to an altitude of 1500 meters above sea level.

The use of ashwagandha for so many centuries has aroused the curiosity of modern medical science, leading to an interest in investigating the medicinal properties of the plant. Preliminary studies on Ashwagandha indicated the presence of potential therapeutic abilities and it also showed no associated toxicity in the chemical constituents of the plant.

Scientific research on the plant indicates that it has anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidizing, anti-stress, sleep-inducing and drug withdrawal properties. Many formulations that are made from Ashwagandha improve the musculo-skeletal problems such as arthritis and rheumatism. It also acts as a tonic that boosts energy, and improves overall health and longevity. Recent research on Ashwagandha conducted at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology in Japan had reported that the leaves of Ashwagandha can selectively inhibit cancer cells.

### Health Benefits of Ashwagandha

Regular consumption of Ashwagandha can result in various health benefits. Some of them are listed below:

**Anti-Carcinogenic Properties:** A research study has termed Ashwagandha as an emerging and novel alternative in the field of oncology because of its cancer killing properties, in association with radiation therapy and chemotherapy. It is also of interest because it is known to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy without interfering with the tumor cell-killing activity.

**Anti-Inflammatory Properties:** Ashwagandha has been found to be effective in dealing with a variety of rheumatologic problems. The herb is known to act as a cyclooxygenase inhibitor that decreases inflammation and pain. The research conducted at the Los Angeles College of Chiropractors suggests that Ashwagandha has anti-inflammatory properties that come from the alkaloids, saponins, and steroidal lactones found within it.

**Antibacterial Properties:** According to Ayurvedic medical texts, Ashwagandha is effective in controlling bacterial infections in humans. A study conducted at the Centre for Biotechnology at the University of Allahabad in India showed

that Ashwagandha possesses antibacterial properties in accordance with that traditional belief. It also concluded that Ashwagandha was effective in urinogenital, gastrointestinal, and respiratory tract infections when consumed orally.

**Cardio-Protective Properties:** Ashwagandha, with its anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant, and anti-stressor properties, is good for cardiovascular health problems. It strengthens the heart muscles and can also control cholesterol. A study at the University of Arizona indicated that it possesses hypolipidemic properties bringing down blood cholesterol levels.

**Anti-Depressant Properties:** In India, Ashwagandha has been traditionally used in Ayurveda to improve both physical and mental health. The effects of Ashwagandha on mental health, particularly in depression, were studied at the Institute of Medical Sciences at Banaras Hindu University in India. The study supported the benefits of Ashwagandha in relation to anxiety and depression.

**Fights Diabetes:** Ashwagandha has long been used as a remedy for diabetes in Ayurvedic medicine. Research on the use of Ashwagandha in the treatment of diabetes indicated positive results. Experiments showed that blood sugar levels during fasting and post-lunch decreased significantly when Ashwagandha was consumed for a period of four weeks.

**Stimulates the Thyroid Gland:** In cases of hypothyroidism, Ashwagandha can be used to stimulate the thyroid gland. A study on Ashwagandha's effects on the thyroid gland revealed that the root extract, if given on a daily basis, would increase the secretion of thyroid hormones.

**Relieves Stress:** Ashwagandha is also believed to possess anti-stress properties. Traditionally, it had been administered to induce a soothing and calming effect on a person. The active ingredient that is responsible for this activity is still unknown, but various anti-stress properties have been observed in research experiments. The results of the study showed that Ashwagandha led to significant reduction in levels of stress in animals put under extreme temperature variations.

**Antioxidant Properties:** Ashwagandha is a very good source of antioxidants. These antioxidants are very effective in scavenging and neutralizing free radicals produced during the process of metabolism.

**Immunomodulatory Properties:** Research studies have showed that the consumption of Ashwagandha led to significant modulation of immune system reactivity and prevented myelosuppression in mice induced by immunosuppressive drugs. It was also observed that Ashwagandha increased the red blood cell, white blood cell, and platelets count.

**Increased Blood Production:** Haematopoiesis is the process of producing new blood. According to research, Ashwagandha possesses hemo-poetic properties. The study showed that red blood cell and white blood cell counts increased significantly in rats which were administered with Ashwagandha. This could mean a positive effect on human red blood cells as well, thereby helping to prevent conditions like anemia.

**Aphrodisiac Properties:** It has been widely believed for many centuries that Ashwagandha had aphrodisiac properties and people used it as a medication to improve vitality and fertility. A recent scientific study indicated that Ashwagandha plays an important role as an aphrodisiac medicine as well as a way to improve semen quality. It also reduces oxidative stress throughout the body.

**Prevents Seizures:** Ashwagandha has been a widely used remedy for seizures and convulsions in Ayurvedic medicine. Another study on Ashwagandha also showed the presence of anticonvulsant properties in this wonderful plant.

**Good Health:** Ashwagandha has been found to be useful in improving muscular strength of the lower limbs and weakness. It also has a positive impact on neuro-muscular coordination.

**Reduces Ocular Diseases:** Research conducted by Thiagarajan et al. has showed that the antioxidant and cytoprotective properties of Ashwagandha were ideal in fighting cataract disease.

#### **Risks of Using Ashwagandha**

**Risk for Pregnant Women:** Pregnant women are advised to avoid consumption of Ashwagandha, as it possesses abortifacient properties.

**Risk of Medical Interactions:** Doctors advise caution while using Ashwagandha because it could interact with regular medications, especially for those who are suffering from diseases like diabetes, hypertension, anxiety, depression, and insomnia.

**Other:** Avoid consumption of Ashwagandha in large amounts, as this may have side effects such as diarrhea, upset stomach, and nausea.



### How Can Ashwagandha Be Taken?

Ashwagandha root is available in the market either in powdered form, dried form, or fresh root form.

**Ashwagandha Tea:** You can make a tea of Ashwagandha by boiling the powder in water for 10 minutes. Don't use more than a teaspoon of the powder in one cup of water.

You could also take Ashwagandha root powder, along with a glass of hot milk before going to sleep