

Herbal heroes

Which herbs really get results? Scientifically proven super plants are boons for a strong brain and body. Naturopath **Caroline Robertson** highlights five must-have herbs for health and happiness.



Ashwagandha
(*Withania somnifera*)

“Ashwagandha is the ultimate anti-stress, aphrodisiac, energy tonic,” says Ayurvedic doctor Rama Prasad.

Ashwagandha amps up our passion and performance in all arenas including the bedroom. It increases testosterone, sperm count and motility in men giving them vigor and virility. It also balances the thyroid and female hormones. As ashwagandha lowers cortisol it creates calm clarity, slowing adrenal overdrive. It’s long list of proven effects include lowering

LDL cholesterol, lowering blood sugar, decreasing inflammation, easing anxiety and increasing muscle mass. Known as India’s best rejuvenating herb ashwagandha helps recuperation from any condition as it reduces anxiety, insomnia and depression associated with debility. A 60-day study of 64 people with stress showed a 69 per cent reduction in anxiety and insomnia after ashwagandha. Remember this remedy when your memory lapses as its brain benefits include reversing amyloid peptides associated with dementia.

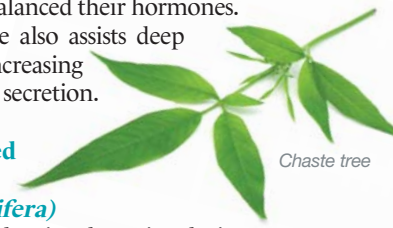
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Chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*)

This popular hormone herb helps a whole range of woman’s issues. Chaste tree is a girl power plant promoting peaceful periods and preventing PMS by modulating prolactin, increasing luteinising hormone and inhibiting follicle-

stimulating hormone. One study showed that after taking vitex over three months, 93 per cent of patients had improved PMS symptoms or a cessation of PMS. It has also been shown to subdue fibroids, hormonal acne, menopausal symptoms, endometriosis, fibrocystic breast disease and menstrual migraines. Chaste tree can increase fertility by stimulating ovulation thus normalising progesterone as shown in a study where 48 infertile women took it for three months and seven became pregnant while 25 balanced their hormones.

Chaste tree also assists deep sleep by increasing melatonin secretion.



Chaste tree

Grape seed extract
(*Vitis vinifera*)

Grape seeds stimulate circulation, sweep cells clean and create strong connective tissue. Their antioxidant resveratrol appears to have anti-cancer activity and protects the heart along with being a blood thinner. No wonder wine-sipping French have lower heart disease than Americans!

Grape seed’s proanthocyanidins insulate cells against degenerative damage and are 20-50 times more potent than betacarotene, vitamin C or E. Consider grape seed extract



if you want to prevent saggy skin, varicose veins, haemorrhoids, cold extremities, numbness and retinopathy such as macular degeneration and cataracts. Grape seeds' campesterol lowers LDL cholesterol and its tocopherols inhibit fungus. As a great tissue healer, grape seed speeds recovery from surgery and injuries. Grape seeds can also help hay fever and allergies with their natural antihistamine action.

Milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*)

Love your liver and live a long life with milk thistle, also known as St Mary's thistle. As Dr Sandra Cabot advises, "If you stop thrashing your liver into an early state of exhaustion, you will add many years to your life." Our liver has to process an onslaught of toxins over time. Fortunately milk thistle offers protection from poisons such as pharmaceuticals, pesticides, recreational drugs, alcohol, environmental toxins and oxidated fats. It's also the

only emergency antidote to death cap mushroom poisoning. Milk thistle's main hepatoprotective is silymarin which guards liver cells, stimulates liver regeneration and is anti-inflammatory. This makes it invaluable for difficult diseases such as hepatitis C where in one study it reduced the viral load in seven subjects to undetectable levels after 14 days.

Its slightly oestrogenic properties can increase breast milk production and prompt delayed periods. If you're at risk of gallstones consider milk thistle to clear sludge by boosting bile flow. Avoid milk thistle if you're allergic to ragweed herbs.

St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

Are you a worrywart? St John's wort has been used for centuries to settle the nerves and nerve pain. Modern

research reveals hypericum can lift depression through its healing trinity of hypericin, hyperforin and pseudohypericin. These increase circulating levels of four key neurotransmitters (serotonin, noradrenaline, dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid) to decrease depression. To be effective the hypericum preparation should contain a minimum of 0.75mg hypericin standardised extract in the daily dose and may take up to four weeks to yield results. Hypericum can also be used internally and externally to relieve pain and promote healing in bruises, herpes, sciatica and shingles.

Please seek advice from your health professional before taking herbs particularly if pregnant or on prescription medications. ☒



Caroline Robertson is a seasoned Sydney Naturopath with a deep conviction in the efficacy of herbs. For consults, courses or health retreats visit www.carolinerobertson.com.au