

Sleep

The Elixir of Life

How to Restore Sleep with Herbs
and Natural Healing



CHRISTINE HERBERT

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How to restore sleep with herbs
and natural healing

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Please note:

The information in this book is compiled from a blend of historical and modern sources, from folklore and personal experience. It is not intended to replace the professional advice and care of a qualified herbal or medical practitioner. Do not attempt to self-diagnose or self-prescribe for serious long-term problems without first consulting a qualified professional. Heed the cautions given, and if already taking prescribed medicines or if you are pregnant, seek professional advice before using herbal remedies.

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Preface

I was asked if I could recommend a book on treating sleep with herbs, and although I considered this for a while I found I really couldn't. So I decided I had better write one.

This book owes thanks to many people, including all my herbal teachers over the years, many of whom appear here; to my friends and colleagues Julie Bruton-Seal and Jennifer Holland, excellent therapists both who have supported me, kept me healthy and read through this book checking for errors. Also to Matthew Seal for his support and editing.

To all my patients over the years for giving me the experience and learning without which I wouldn't have been able to write this.

To my publishers who decided that it would be worthwhile encouraging me to write.

To my good friends Lora Starling and Holly Gregson for the illustrations, Lora contributing the cartoons and Holly the drawings of plants.

To my son Joe for technical support.

And possibly most of all to my long-suffering partner Mark Naylor who keeps me grounded, and often makes excellent practical suggestions.

Introduction

In my 22 years of practice as a herbalist I have found that most people who come to me for healing have some kind of sleep issue among their other health problems. Sometimes it is as little as always waking at 5am, at other times it can be almost sleepless nights.

I have learned that if I can help someone to put their sleep patterns right it will very often follow that many of their other health problems also improve. The key to improving sleep is the key for that individual's health, and it will vary enormously from person to person.

If you read a magazine article or an Internet feature on sleep it will talk about using sedative herbs such as valerian or chamomile. But that rarely works when the underlying health problem is the cause of disturbed sleep. So this book is aimed at understanding and treating the underlying causes of disturbed sleep patterns. It is not yet another book about sleep hygiene and soporific herbs, although these subjects have their place here too.

This book is aimed at therapists, especially herbalists, but all health therapists; and also at anyone with sleep problems, whatever their knowledge base. I very much hope that there is enough explanatory information so that anyone can use this book, and I apologise to those with enough knowledge already that this may be old hat. We all benefit from exploring things we believe we already know.

For non-herbalists, you will find that all herbs are described by their common name and also their Latin binomial so there can be no confusion on which plant I refer to. Most herbs can be bought online or over the counter, although provenance is important. Obviously it is essential to buy from somewhere you can trust to supply the correct herb. I suggest some places to buy herbs or find a herbalist at the end of the book in the resource section. In many cases it can be better to seek the help of a herbalist to select the best herbs for the individual, but it is possible to make some choices alone.

Historically, issues around sleep were considered vitally important and there were many words of advice written about sleep. In her book *Sleep in Early Modern England* Sasha Handley says of the Roman poet Ovid:

In his classic work *Metamorphosis*, ... Ovid presents sleep as a unique state of alteration that has supported and threatened human life since the universe was created. In his verse, sleep can radically transform human beings by transporting them between the ordinary realms of nature and an enchanted world of magical power. Here the tranquil and troubled sleep of humans lies in the hands of the gods.

Handley quotes from the Manchester physician and clergyman Thomas Cogan, in the sixteenth century: 'The benefit of sleepe, or the necessity rather needeth no prooffe, for that without it no living creature may long endure, according to the saying of the poet Ovid.'¹

Personally, I have learned a great deal about treating sleep in many hundreds, maybe thousands, of people who have come to consult with me. But I have also experienced sleeplessness, in many forms, and from many causes.

Until I reached menopause I slept like a baby, and knew absolutely nothing about sleep problems myself. However over the last fifteen years or so I have become my own experiment, testing out herbs, supplements, diets, and every single solution to sleep problems you can think of. Of course, what works for me isn't what works for anyone else, but it has taught me that everyone's solution to sleep problems is unique and how to play detective to work it out.

So I know what it is like to spend a whole night tossing and turning and feel as though you haven't slept a wink; or to spend a night waking every hour and feeling as though your sleep has been so light you may as well not have bothered; or to wake in the morning feeling as tired as when you went to bed. I know the despair of feeling you don't know how to go to sleep any more. I know how wonderful I feel when I have achieved five, six or even that elusive eight hours of sleep in one long session.

Hence this book, because I finally believe that I have some answers that will help at least some people, and if I do help only a few of those insomniacs to sleep better it will have been worthwhile.

Chapter 1 looks at the basic sleep hygiene information that you will find in every book on sleep. Then chapter 2 deals with babies and children. From then on each chapter will look at the underlying causes for an individual's sleep problems, so chapter 3 covers diet and digestion;

chapter 4, stress and anxiety; chapter 5, hormonal imbalance; chapter 6, the urinary system; chapter 7, pain; and chapter 8, other health issues, which, if resolved, will solve sleep problems.

To repeat – and this is possibly the most important sentence in this book – **if the underlying cause is not discovered and dealt with, no amount of sleep hygiene, or even sleeping pills, will sort it out.**

Then, chapter 9, the *Materia Medica*, deals in more depth with all the herbs; chapter 10 discusses flower remedies and essential oils; the concluding chapter, 11, deals with diets and supplements.



Rosemary