



## Ashwagandha (*Withania Somnifera*); A potential aphrodisiac drug in Ayurveda

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### Abstract

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is a shrub of Solanaceae family. (Solanum =comforting) commonly known as winter cherry. *Balada, Gandhanta, Vajinama, Balya, Punya, Vrusha* are some of its Sanskrit names. This shrub attains a height of 1-2 mtrs. Its branches distributed in all directions and rounded. Leaves are alternate, 5-10cms long rounded and hair. Flowers are inflorescence in bunch, umbrella erupting from the base of the leaves. Sessile flowers, greenish or lurid yellow cyme. Fruits are small, round, juicy, capsulated, bright red like gunja seeds. Seeds are small, slimy and flat. The pharmacological importance of this plant is anti-oxidant, anxiolytic, adaptogen, memory enhancing, anti-venom, anti-inflammatory, antitumor properties. Various other effects like hypolipidemic, anti-bacterial, immunomodulation, cardiovascular protection and sexual behaviour is also influenced by Ashwagandha. It is a potential aphrodisiac drug in Ayurveda. It is one of the best herbs for building fertility and libido for both men and women. *Ashwagandha* is relatively inexpensive than other medicinal plants because it is easily grown and the roots require only a year to harvest. Infertility is defined as the failure of a couple to conceive after 12 months of unprotected sexual intercourse. Infertility affects 15% of all couples with approximately 50% of these having detectable male partner abnormality, usually because of lack of sperm motility and low sperm count. In general, there is a lack of specific medically effective therapies for male infertility. However, Ayurvedic and other systems of traditional herbal medicine around the world offer many effective options. *Ashwagandha* herb is one such option, and that a modern scientific study has been found to be effective is of great value for its aphrodisiac nature.

**Key words:** Ashwagandha, Impotency, Aphrodisiac, Infertility.

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### Introduction

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) also known as Indian ginseng, poison gooseberry, or winter cherry, is a plant in the Solanaceae or nightshade family. It is a wellknown herb of the Indian ayurvedic system of medicine as a *rasayan*. It is used for various kinds of disease processes and many studies were carried out. It is no wonder, with all the benefits this beloved whole plant has to offer! Ashwagandha has been used in Indian system of medicine for thousands of years as a *Rasayana* and it is renowned as an apoptogenic herb, which means it is used to help the body resist psychological and physiological stress by adapting to the needs of the body accordingly.

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*Ashwagandha* functions as to tone, revitalize and support bodily functions. It has been valued over time for its dual capacity to energize and calm at the same time. Stress can cause fatigue, often manifesting as “hyper” signs like tension and difficulty napping. By providing a nourishing, yet energizing effect, *ashwagandha* can support a healthy nervous system. With the use of *ashwagandha*, stress doesn’t impact the nervous system with such intensity, and the “hyper” signs of stress and agitation will naturally resolve over time<sup>1</sup>. *Rasayan* is described as herbal and metallic preparations that promotes a youthful state of physical and mental health and expands happiness. *Ashwagandha* holds the most prominent place and is known as “*sattvic rasayan*” herb and it has anti stress effect. The root of *ashwagandha* is regarded as narcotic, diuretic, tonic, aphrodisiac, astringent, stimulant and thermogenic. The root smell like horse “*ashwa*”, that is why it is called *ashwagandha*. It is commonly used for growth and nutritive effect in children, debility from old age, vitiated conditions of Vata, constipation etc. The paste formed when roots of *ashwagandha* are crushed with water and is applied at joints to reduce the inflammation. It can be locally applied in carbuncles and painful swellings. In snake venom the root of *ashwagandha* in combination with other drugs is prescribed. The leaves are recommended in painful swellings and fever. The flowers are aphrodisiac, astringent, depurative as well as diuretic. The seeds of *ashwagandha* are antihelmentic and used for eyes diseases, it can be combined with astringent and rock salt to remove white spots from the cornea. *Ashwagandharishta* is used in memory loss, syncope, hysteria, anxiety, etc. It also acts as stimulant in males and increases the sperm count. Flowering in *ashwagandha* occurs in spring and fruits in winter. In rainy season seeds of *Ashwagandha* are to be implanted and in *hemanta ritu* harvesting of *ashwagandha* plant should be done. In these specific seasons the parts of plants collected are said to be best. Male impotency can have many causes, including physiological and psychological ones. However, many if not most cases of functional male impotency are accompanied with low sperm count and low sperm motility. Whereas *Ashwagandha* can serve as an aphrodisiac in stimulating libido in both the genders and it builds semen potency as well and considered best as a potential aphrodisiac drug.

#### Ayurvedic description



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**Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)**

**Solanaceae Family**

**Medicinal Qualities:**

<b>Ras</b>	<b>Katu, tikta, kashaya</b>
<b>Guna</b>	<b>Snigdha, laghu</b>
<b>Veerya</b>	<b>Usna</b>
<b>Vipaka</b>	<b>Katu</b>
<b>Prabhava</b>	<b>Balances tridoshas, especially kapha and vata</b>
<b>Parts used</b>	<b>Roots, leaves and alkali, flowers and seeds</b>
<b>Formulations</b>	<b>Ashwagandhadi lepa, Brahmi vati, Ashwagandharishta etc.</b>
<b>Charak classification</b>	<b>Balya, Brihaneeya</b>

**According to different acharyas**

	<b>Ras</b>	<b>Guna</b>	<b>Veerya</b>	<b>Vipaka</b>	<b>Prabhava</b>
<b>Bhav Prakash</b>	<b>Tikta, Kashaya</b>	<b>Snigdha, Laghu</b>	<b>Ushna</b>	<b>Katu</b>	<b>Balkarak, Shukravardhak, Rasayan, Vatakaphashamak</b>
<b>Kaidev Nighantu</b>	<b>Tikta, Kashaya</b>	<b>Snigdha, Laghu</b>	<b>Ushna</b>	<b>Katu</b>	<b>Rasayan, Pushtikarak, Shukravardhak, Balkarak</b>
<b>Dhanvantari Nighantu</b>	<b>Tikta, kashaya</b>	<b>Snigdha, Laghu</b>	<b>Ushna</b>	<b>Katu</b>	<b>Vatakaphashamak</b>

**Phytochemistry:**

Ashwagandha is an important source of many medicinally and pharmacologically important chemicals such as sitoindosides withaferins and various useful alkaloids. The withanolides are the most searched chemical constituent. Withaferin A and 3 b hydroxy 2, dihydrowithanolide F isolated from ashwagandha show promising antitumoral, immunomodulating as well antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

**Action and Uses Of Ashwagandha:**

**External Uses:**

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It reduces oedema and pain, that is why leaves and root paste is applied on enlarged cervical glands or swelling of other glands. In vata diseases and weakness, oil massage is done. The juice of ashwagandha leaves is used as eardrops in ear discharge.

**Internal Uses:**

<b>Nervous system</b>	As it is a sedative and nervine tonic, it helps in atonic nerves, fainting giddiness and insomnia.
<b>Digestive system</b>	The bark powder is appetizer, carminative and antihelminthic and hence used in abdominal pain, constipation and worms.
<b>Circulatory system</b>	It has an effect on the heart, purifies the blood and reduces oedema.
<b>Respiratory system</b>	It is an expectorant and has anti-histamic property, due to which it is useful in cough. Ashwagandha ash along with ghee and honey is effective in asthma. If phlegm is thin, it is used in the form of ash or its alkaline extract is used. In cough and asthma decoction of bark should be given in low dose.
<b>Reproductive system</b>	Ashwagandha is well known for its aphrodisiac property. It is used in semen disorders and leucorrhoea caused due to endometritis. A mixture of 5gms of ashwagandha powder+ 10gms of ghee+ 250ml milk+ sugar is a good tonic, nutritious and also aphrodisiac. It completely cures puerperal backache.
<b>Urinary system</b>	It is a diuretic and so used in oliguria or anurea. It is used to strengthen medo dhatu.
<b>Skin</b>	It is used in vitiligo and other skin diseases, blisters heal when black ashes of the root are applied on them.

**Benefits Of Ashwagandha:**

- Anxiolytic- antidepressant
- Anti-convulsant activity
- Helps in erectile dysfunction
- Anti- oxidant activity
- Effects on cardio-pulmonary system
- Anti-inflammatory properties
- Improves cardiorespiratory endurance
- Anti-cancer property
- Immune function
- Haemopoetic effect

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- Anti- arthritic effect

#### Pharmacological Activities:

Ashwagandha has been widely studied for their various Pharmacological activities like anti-oxidant, anxiolytic, adaptogen, memory enhancing, anti-venom, anti-inflammatory, antitumor properties. Various other effects like immunomodulation, hypolipidemic, anti-bacterial, cardiovascular protection, sexual behaviour is also influenced by Ashwagandha.

#### Mode of Action of Ashwagandha:

**Aphrodisiac:** Due to the sweetness present in ashwagandha, it helps in nourishment and enhancement of *rasadi dhatus*. Specifically, *mansa* and *shukradhatu*. *Madhura ras* and *madur vipaka* helps to increase *shukra* and its *usna virya* helps in *shukra pravartan*. So, *ashwagandha* has best aphrodisiac effect. The *tikta ras* present in *ashwagandha* helps to increase the *dhatvagni* and in formation of *dhatus*. For instant aphrodisiac effect *ashwagandha* should be used with *ksheer*, *ghee* and *sharkara*. *Shukra kshaya* leads to *Rajakshama*. *Ashwagandha* mixed *ghrita* gives the best effect in *rajakshama*. Due to *shukra janana* and *shukra Vardhan* effect of *ashwagandha* it should be used in *shukra kshaya*.

**Rasayan:** Due to the *Madhur ras* and *snigdha guna* present in *ashwagandha* it helps to increase from *Ras dhatu* to *Shukra dhatu*. *Tikta ras* does *agni deepana karma*. Therefore, *dhatu* gets nourished and enhanced. *Ashwagandha* helps to increase *prithvi* and *jal mahabhuta Pradhan ansh* present in *dhatu* which results in increase of *mansa dhatu*. *Mansa dhatu* helps to provide nourishment to body and helps in *brimhan karma*.

**Kasa Shwas:** *Tikta ras* and *usna veerya* helps in *kapha viliyan* and decrease *kapha*. When *kapha viliyan* occurs *prana vayu anuloman* takes place which helps to clear the obstruction of *srotas*. In *kshayaj kasa ashwagandha kwath* mixed with *ksheer* is indicated. In *kaphaj tamak shwas ashwagandhamashi* should be liked with *madhu*.

**Shotha:** *Tikta ras* helps in blood purification and is anti- inflammatory. Hence in blood vitiated disorder and *vataj shota ashwagandha* mixed *ghrita* should be used. It helps in *dhatu kshayajanya shotha*.

#### Scientific Research Based Evidence on Ashwagandha:

##### Ashwagandha In Erectile Dysfunction (ED)

Erectile dysfunction is the persistent inability to attain and maintain an erection sufficient to permit satisfactory sexual performance. ED affects physical and psychosocial health and has a significant impact on the quality of life of sufferers and their partners and families. In the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), the prevalence of sexual dysfunctions (not specific ED) was 31%<sup>2</sup>. In Classical texts, sexual dysfunctions are allocated under the domain of *Klaibya*. *Susruta* first described the condition called *Manasa Klaibya*, which closely resembles with Psychogenic

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Erectile Dysfunction and for treating this condition Susruta has given priority to *Hetu Viparyaya Chikitsa* and various *Vajeekarana Yogas*<sup>3</sup>. For treating Psychogenic Erectile Dysfunction, the drug should possess the qualities of *Vajeekarana* and at the same time it should be able to pacify the vitiated *Manasika Doshas*. *Ashwagandha* is widely claimed to have potent sedative, rejuvenative, aphrodisiac, and life-prolonging properties. It is also used as a general energy-enhancing tonic known as *Medharasayana*<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Anxiolytic – Antidepressant Activity of Ashwagandha:**

Many studies on ashwagandha, its anxiolytic and antidepressant actions of the bioactive glycowithanolides are investigated found to be isolated from ashwagandha roots in rats elicited bylorazepam and imipramine. The investigators support the use of *ashwagandha* as a mood stabilizer in clinical conditions of anxiety in Ayurveda.

#### **Ashwagandha In Improving Cardiorespiratory Endurance:**

*Ashwagandha* has been traditionally used as vitalizer helps to promote longevity, helps in improving immunity, improve endurance and stamina and helps in male and female fertility.

A prospective, randomized, and placebo-controlled study was done to evaluate the efficacy of Ashwagandha roots extract in enhancing cardiorespiratory endurance and improving the quality of life (QOL) in 50 healthy male/female athletic adults. As a result of this the QOL scores for all subdomains significantly improved to a greater extent in the Ashwagandha group at 12 weeks compared to placebo ( $P < 0.05$ ). The findings suggest that Ashwagandha root extract enhances the cardiorespiratory endurance and improves QOL in healthy athletic adults<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Ashwagandha in Menopausal syndrome**

Menopause is a gradual and natural transitional phase of adjustment between the active and inactive ovarian function and occupies several years of a women's life and involves biological and psychological changes adjustments. Anxiety is one of the prominent features of post-menopausal women because of sudden withdrawal of sex hormone i.e., estrogen and progesterone. *Ashwagandha* is one of the *Medhya rasayan* but also acts as anxiolytic drug. So it helps to reduce anxiety level in post-menopausal women and hence improve the quality of life. A randomized open clinical trial was done under the direction of Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences, New Delhi to evaluate the efficacy for *Ashwagandha churna*, *Ashokarishta* and *Praval pishti* in the management of postmenopausal syndrome and it was concluded that combined treatment of above drugs gives better result in both somatic as well as psychological complaints in women with mild to moderate symptoms of menopausal syndrome<sup>6</sup>.

#### **Discussion**

*Ashwagandha* has a long history in traditional medicines as an aphrodisiac. Modern scientific studies suggest that ashwagandha's amorous reputation may be warranted, and that it may be a natural herbal alternative treatment for loss of libido and erectile dysfunction. In sexual dysfunction Mental stress, anxiety, and depression are all significant factors as well. According to some data, if untreated depression can reduce libido 40-74% of cases, and cause ED in up to 50% of men suffering from depressive conditions. Anxiety disorders were associated with 33% and

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46% of reduced libido for both men and women, respectively 10% of men suffering from anxiety experienced ED as well<sup>7</sup>. Testosterone is actually found in both men and women—just at lower levels in women. Reduced testosterone levels associated with age or conditions that because hormonal imbalances are associated with loss of libido for both genders and are also linked to erectile dysfunction (ED) in men. Ashwagandha not only deals with testosterone level but also helps in anxiety and depression which ultimately leads to management of erectile dysfunction. Ashwagandha has *shukra janan* and *shukra Vardhan* properties. *Ashwagandha* is not only a potential aphrodisiac drug but also helps in improving cardiorespiratory endurance and in menopausal syndrome. *Ashwagandha* is best known for its powerful adaptogenic properties, meaning that it helps mind and body adapt better to stress. It provides nourishment to the nerves and helps in improving nerve function which helps to maintain a person to be calm during stressful and threatened situations. It is also good for people who do physical labour or exercise a lot, to help the body adapt to physical stress. *Ashwagandha* is a *Rasayana*, i.e., it acts as an overall tonic which help the one to achieve greater vitality and longevity. It helps to nourish all the bodily tissues i.e., *Dhatu*, including the joints and nerves. It is also a *Medhya Rasayana*, and it enhances *Dhi*, *Dhriti* and *Smriti*. Ashwagandha nourishes the Psycho neuro immune response (called PNI) and crucial mind-body connection and it helps to coordinate between the mind and senses, as well, which is essential for good quality sleep. It balances the mind (*Prana Vata*). It increases the *Ojas* which is the master coordinator between the body and consciousness. Ashwagandha enhances virility and has aphrodisiac properties, especially for men.

## Conclusion

Ashwagandha can stimulate production of testosterone and considered the potential aphrodisiac drug in Ayurveda. Studies shown that Ashwagandha is also a proven stress reliever and also effective in treatment of both anxiety and depression and also helps in improving cardiorespiratory endurance, menopausal syndrome and erectile dysfunction.

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