

Abstract

Ashwagandha is an evergreen shrub that grows in India, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. Its roots and orange-red fruit have been used for hundreds of years for medicinal purposes. The herb is also called Indian ginseng or winter cherry.

The name ashwagandha describes the smell of its root (like a horse). By definition, ashwa means horse.

The herb is considered one of the most important herbs in the Ayurvedic medicine system, a healthcare practice that started in India over 3,000 years ago.

Ayurvedic medicine uses herbs, special diets, and other natural practices as treatment for a variety of conditions. In Ayurvedic medicine, ashwagandha is considered a Rasayana. That means it's an herb that helps maintain youth, both mentally and physically.

Historically, the roots of ashwagandha have been used to treat:

- arthritis
- constipation
- insomnia
- skin conditions
- stress
- gastrointestinal issues
- diabetes
- nervous breakdowns
- fevers

- snake bites
- memory loss

The leaves, seeds, and even fruit have all been used in different ways for various treatments.

Today, ashwagandha is sold as a supplement in the United States. It's still used to treat many of the conditions listed above. It also continues to be important in Indian medicine. Read on to learn more about the potential benefits of the herb as well as possible concerns.