

Herbs for Improving Memory & Mental Clarity

Deb Soule, Herbalist, Avena Botanicals, author of *How to Move Like a Gardener & Healing Herbs for Women*. www.avenabotanicals.com, www.debsoule.com

Our biodynamic farm and shop, Rockport, Maine, are open Mon-Fri, noon-5pm, year round

FOUR PILLARS OF HEALTH

1. Living in rhythm with seasonal, solar and lunar cycles. Regular connection with nature & daily practice of gratitude.
2. Self-awareness and spiritual practices: meditation, prayer, compassion, yoga, chi gong, walking, hiking, journaling, gardening, singing, playing and listening to music, artistic projects. Be educated & work to change how systems of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, etc) & lack of good quality food adversely affect individuals and communities, locally and globally.
3. Whole foods diet. Nutritive herbs and foods. Relaxing herbal teas.
4. Flower essences, homeopathy, healing baths, and cleansing herbs to keep our minds, hearts, Spirit and energetic body calm and in balance.

Chinese medicine practitioners believe that *shen* (spirit, consciousness) is stored in the Heart. Disturbed *shen* can cause symptoms such as impaired memory, agitation, anxiety, heart palpitations, and insomnia. **Herbs for easing disturbed shen and supporting stress resilience: Hawthorn flower, leaf, & berry, Schisandra berry, Rose, Lemon balm, Linden, Motherwort, Milky Oat seed & Passionflower.**

Herbs that quiet the mind, support meditation & improve memory: Bacopa, Gotu kola, Holy Basil, Rose.

Nourish the spleen: white basmati rice cooked with spices like cardamom seeds, cumin seeds, fennel seeds. **Solomon's seal root & Codonopsis root**-both are sweet and nourishing to spleen. Supports flexibility of physical body and mind.

Blood building herbs support memory: Nettle leaf tea, tincture, vinegar, ashwagandha root powder, yellow dock root tea, tincture, syrup. Codonopsis root as tincture or tea. Dandelion root and leaf supports the liver, is high in minerals, is grounding & helps focus the mind. Liver stores iron. A healthy liver is essential for improving digestion, assimilation and elimination.

Healthy digestion: A healthy microbiome, gut flora, is essential for overall health and for balancing and stabilizing our emotions and mind. The gut contains lots of neurotransmitters and immune cells. **Ginger and Turmeric, Bitter Herbs, Fermented foods-including miso,** taken regularly, support the gut.

Lavender: Lavender glycerite taken internally relaxes, balances & calms the nervous system, improves sluggish digestion, uplifts the Spirit, reduces anxiety and brings clarity to the mind. Pure essential oil of lavender used in aromatherapy-foot and full body baths, infusers, steam inhalation, cremes and oils-helps reduce anxiety, calms the mind and body, promotes a more restful sleep.

High-Quality Fats & Complete Protein

The brain is around 60% fat. The myelin sheath that protects nerve endings is mostly fat. Daily intake of foods high in Omega-3's and monounsaturated fat-rich foods: organic olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocados & cold-water wild fatty fish (2-3 times/week) improves cognitive function & memory, has been shown to reduce risk of dementia and Alzheimer's, & reduces levels of beta-amyloid plaque which diminishes brain function and . Cold-water wild fatty fish (sardines, herring, mackerel, trout), not without ecological challenges, are highest sources of omega-3's. Plant sources of omega-3's: purslane, walnuts, chia seeds, flax seeds, hemp seeds. Pasture-raised eggs contain omega-3's, are easily digested complete protein, the yolks contain choline which helps body make acetylcholine-an important neurotransmitter that declines as we age. Low acetylcholine (Ach) is associated with Alzheimer's.

Mint-Family Herbs that Inhibit the Enzyme Actychoinesterase that Breaks down the Neurotransmitter Acetylcholine

Lemon balm: Lemon balm glycerite taken internally eases mild depression, anxiety and feelings of overwhelm, improves attention, focus & cognitive function, decreases hyperactivity in children & adults, and uplifts the Spirit.

Rosemary: Improves memory, focus, alertness & awakens consciousness. Helps decrease anxiety. Use with fresh ginger in tea, cooking, & as a tea or pure essential oil in foot and full body baths. Rub 1 drop of pure essential oil into scalp as needed to improve alertness & memory.

Sage: Inhaling sage-grow a plant near the entrance to your home-improves memory and word recall and balances mood swings. Use 1-2 drops of pure essential oil in foot and full body baths. Sage contains some thujone, considered toxic when used orally in large doses. Herbalist David Hoffman recommends not using more than 15 grams of sage leaf per dose. I like using fresh sage, parsley & oregano leaves in pesto.

Spearmint: Useful as tea or tincture to improve memory, focus and attention span.

Peppermint: Useful internally as a tea or glycerite. Breathing the pure essential oil helps increase memory, alertness and recall time.

Exercise for Body & Brain

Moving the body stimulates the brain to produce more neurons, protects neurons from damage and balances the neurotransmitters (serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine) that affect our moods and overall vitality. Exercise helps the brain create more Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) which feeds the brain, makes new neurons, improves day to day function and lessens risk of Alzheimer's.

Meditation supports brain health.

Other exercises for improving brain function and memory include learning a new language, reading, playing music, crosswords & puzzles, time in nature.

Volunteering helps us focus less on ourselves and more on others and builds an inner capacity for compassion.

Sleep, Chronic Stress & Trauma

Lack of good quality sleep contributes to poor memory and brain health by not allowing the body to metabolize waste products and toxins in the brain and release them during sleep. There are many reasons why people live with chronic stress & are unable to sleep deeply. Some may be the result of different kinds of trauma. Address underlying causes which may include healing old or current traumatic events. **Work with trauma-sensitive practitioners and herbs that ease disturbed shen and support stress resilience. Smell pure essential oil of lemon balm, lavender, rose.**

Passionflower taken internally as a tincture or tea nourishes the Heart and calms the Spirit. Eases insomnia caused by a restless mind with circulating thoughts.

Helps to lessen anxiety, agitation, and heart palpitations. Chinese herbalist Thomas Avery Garran says passionflower gives the Spirit a comfortable place to reside. **Codonopsis root tincture**, adaptogen, helps exhausted people to sleep.

Herbs for Enhancing Memory, Mental Clarity & Stress Resilience

Schisandra *Schisandra chinensis*

Temperament & flavor: Warm, dry, sweet, sour, salty, bitter and pungent. The Chinese name, Wu wei zi, means "five flavors fruit."

Part used: red berries Perennial vine. Grows well in Maine

Actions: Adaptogen, astringent, hepato-protective, improves memory, eases insomnia, eases inflammation, steadies the heart. Schisandra treats the Chinese Heart, lung and kidneys by helping one hold on to what is eternally valuable in life. When taken over several weeks or months the berries astringent and adaptogenic properties help build one's inner capacity to be less reactive and to be more inwardly resilient and physically grounded. The berries help the Kidney to grasp the ch/qi, making it possible to breath more deeply. Schisandra holds the Heart steady so one's light can shine.

Safety considerations: Avoid use during pregnancy, acute fevers, flu and pneumonia, and any acute skin condition with heat.

Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera*

Temperament and flavor: warming, sweet, bitter, oily

Parts used: dried root Grow as annual in Maine

Actions: Calms and clears the mind, improves memory, helps restore sleep. Useful in many conditions caused by stress, including insomnia, anxiety, and ADHD. Strengthens an exhausted nervous system, lessens emotional instability, agitation, and "burn out". Energizing while calming.

Safety considerations: Avoid during pregnancy and if on hyperthyroid medications.

Shatavari *Asparagus racemosus*

Temperament and flavor: cooling, sweet, bitter

Parts used: root

Actions: Calms anxiety, promotes memory and mental clarity and increases resilience to stress. Nervine and brain tonic. Very nourishing, rejuvenating and moistening herb, especially for women. Beneficial to the eyes.

Safety considerations: Avoid use during acute lung congestion and estrogen induced fibrocystic breasts.

Bacopa *Bacopa monnieri*

Part used: leafy aerial parts. Grow in hanging pots.

Flavor and temperament: bitter, sweet, cooling

Actions: adaptogen, anti-inflammatory, anxiolytic, immunostimulant, nervine, rejuvenative.

Bacopa is a very beneficial Ayurvedic herb known to rejuvenate the nervous system, increase resilience to stress and improve brain function. It helps in the retention of new information, promotes memory, focus and concentration, is said to help slow the progression of Alzheimer's, supports recovery from brain trauma, eases emotional stress and mental exhaustion, and increases energy and vitality. When used 1-2 times daily over several weeks or months, Bacopa helps to calm the mind and support meditation. Bacopa also supports low thyroid function.

Safety consideration: Consult with your health care provider before using Bacopa if you have hypertension or heart arrhythmias or are using antidepressants, calcium channel blockers or thyroid medications.

Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba*

Temperament and flavor: cooling, bitter, sour, pungent

Parts used: greenish-yellow leaves, seeds

Actions: Brain tonic-prevents adverse affects of aging such as poor memory and concentration, hearing loss. Improves cerebral circulation. Anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory and circulatory effects, increasing microcirculation to the brain. Improves the way the brain uses oxygen, glucose and ATP for energy, prevents strokes. **Research showed combining ginkgo with codonopsis root increased learning and memory retention.**

Safety considerations: Avoid with calcium channel blockers, warfarin or any anticoagulant, general anesthetics, MAO inhibitors, insulin or hypoglycemics.

Gotu Kola *Centella asiatica or Hydrocotyle asiatica*

Part used: leaf, aerial parts

Flavor and temperament: sweet, bitter, cooling

Actions: adaptogen, anxiolytic, anti-inflammatory, brain tonic, nervine, rejuvenative, vulnerary

An Ayurvedic herb valued for enhancing concentration and alertness, improving memory, and relaxing the brain when over-stimulated. Improves mood and cognitive function. Can be used for folks with learning challenges, autism and Asperger's. Calms and relaxes the central nervous system. Reduces anxiety, depression and insomnia. Supportive to people who meditate as gotu kola helps to quiet the mind

and cultivate a harmonious and compassionate state of being. A rejuvenative herb for supporting adrenal function and rebuilding energy reserves.

Gotu kola is beneficial to ingest after any kind of physical trauma or surgery as it stimulates microcirculation to the injury, speeds healing, and increases integrity of the skin.

Safety considerations: Caution during pregnancy. Avoid gotu kola if using pharmaceuticals, alcohol, or opiates.

Holy Basil *Ocimum sanctum*

Flavor & temperament: Pungent, bitter, warming, dry

Part used: Leaf and flower

Actions: Adaptogen, aromatic, carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant, relaxing nervine. Enhances a quality of harmony and spiritual clarity. Opens the heart and mind. Lowers cortisol levels. Improves memory and clarity. Repairs damage to DNA from over exposure to radiation. Grow Tulsi in pots at the entrance to your home and workplace to clear the energy and offer inspiration and harmony.

Safety considerations: Avoid during pregnancy.

Rose *Rosa rugosa*

Temperament & flavor of flower petals: cool, moist sweet, bitter, pungent

Parts used: Petals, rose hips, rose hip seed oil

Actions: Aromatic, astringent, carminative, decongesting, detoxifying, relaxing nervine. Opens the heart and mind, cultivating love and compassion for self and others. Helpful during times of stress and despair for the world. Comforting and harmonizing for the Heart.

Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina & Stress Relief by David Winston, S. Maimes

Body into Balance: An Herbal Guide to Holistic Self-Care by Maria Noel Groves

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World
by His Holiness the Dalai Lama & Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide by Rosemary Gladstar

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness by David Treleaven