Herb Blurb

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Valerian

Part Used: Root

Daily Dose: 1–3 cups of tea (from dried root), up to 1 tsp. liquid tincture; 300–900 mg capsules or tablets

Warning: Not for use by pregnant women, nursing moms or while drinking or using other sedatives.

Valerian root may have that funky-socks smell of liquid ritonavir, but this calming herb has remained popular since the Golden Age as a remedy for insomnia, mild anxiety and menstrual and muscle cramps. Valerian's relaxing properties are likely due to chemicals that bind to the same brain receptors as powerful sedatives such as Valium (no relation): The herb increases the secretion—and decreases the breakdown—of a tranquilizing brain chemical called GABA. Clinical studies confirm that valerian hastens shut-eye and improves sleep quality. So sleep-deprived, stressed-out HIVers can look to warm baths, meditation and the many new designer sedatives for relief, but a cup of valerian tea is also worth a try—even if you have to hold your nose.

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