

HERBAL SUPPORT FOR POSTPARTUM ANXIETY

Table of Contents

Introduction

- Background
- Scope of paper
- Caveat : Postpartum psychosis

Postpartum Anxiety

- Definition of PPA
- Postpartum timeline
- Prevalence and impact
- Comparison to baby blues and postpartum depression
- Complications of PPA
- Causes of PPA
- Risk factors

Body Systems Affected

- Nervous system
- Immune system
- Digestive system
- Cardiovascular system
- Musculoskeletal system
- Respiratory system

Common Hardships

- Reaching out
- Making space for self-care

Modern Medical Approach

- Treatments
- Common medication side effects
- Other problems with the modern medical approach
- Harm reduction

Holistic Approach

- Herbs
- Breathwork
- Restorative sleep
- Movement activities
- Bodywork modalities
- Professional mental health support
- Social network

Herbalist Guidelines for Supporting Clients with PPA

Body Systems Supported by Herbs

- Nervous system
- Immune system
- Digestive system
- Cardiovascular system
- Musculoskeletal system
- Respiratory system

Highlighted Nervines

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Eleuthero, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Linden, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Pasque Flower, Passionflower, Red Clover, Reishi, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Lettuce, Wood Betony

Nervine Energetics Chart

Warming, cooling, drying, moistening, bitter, pungent, salty, sour, sweet

Herbal Actions Glossary

Actions indicated for anxiety

Actions indicated for physical manifestations of anxiety

Herbal Preparations

Teas

Tinctures

Herbal baths

Massage oils

Flower essences

Additional Recommendations

Lifestyle

Nutrition

Supplements

Conclusion

Encouragement for trying a holistic approach

Integrating professional mental health support

Warning signs warranting medical intervention

Quick Tips for Herbalists Supporting People with PPA

Cautions and Contraindications for Herbs During Lactation

Author's Story

Resources

Introduction

Background

Postpartum anxiety (PPA) is common and treatable, yet many people suffering from PPA go without help. This may be due, in part, to the relative invisibility of this anxiety disorder. Postpartum depression (PPD) is slightly more prevalent and has received much more attention. Some people with PPA may not realize that this is what they are experiencing, or they may not know that treatment options exist. More education on PPA is needed for pregnant people and their circle so that they can recognize signs of PPA and know how to get help. A further complication is that awareness of PPA may not always be enough. Some people may feel reluctant to admit having PPA because it does not fit into the idealized, blissful image of having a new baby. Unfortunately, such shyness can keep people from getting the support they need. Thus, education on PPA should be contextualized to destigmatize mental health disorders. Ideally, people would also learn that in addition to the modern medical approach, there are alternative modalities that can help with PPA, including herbs. In the words of herbalist Rosemary Gladstar, herbs are an “accessible, inexpensive, natural, gentle, and most importantly, effective system of healing” [Gladstar, *Medicinal herbs*, 12]. Herbal interventions can be the basis of treatment for PPA, or part of a holistic protocol, or just complementary to allopathic care.

Scope of paper

This paper focuses on herbal interventions and other lifestyle strategies to support people experiencing PPA. While herbs can be powerful allies during difficult times, they can not always provide comprehensive care on their own. Therefore, these recommendations for herbs and herbal formulas are intended to complement any professional mental health support that an individual may need. During every visit with a client, it is important to reassess whether the chosen herbs are helping and also whether additional healthcare is warranted.

Caveat

For clarity, this paper addresses postpartum anxiety, *not* postpartum psychosis (PPP) - “a severe disorder that warrants acute clinical intervention” with medical care because it is potentially life-threatening [Bergink]. PPP is the sudden onset of more extreme symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, agitation, manic behavior and thoughts of harming oneself or others. Much less common than postpartum anxiety, PPP occurs in only 1-5 out of every 1,000 births, which is only 0.1-0.5%, compared to 10% of parents experiencing postpartum anxiety. The perinatal period - just before, during and immediately after giving birth - is a vulnerable one: the most likely phase of a birthing parent’s life in which they may experience psychosis [Maguire]. Ultimately, vulnerability at this life juncture means that all birthing parents need support.

Postpartum Anxiety

Definition

Postpartum anxiety (PPA) is an anxiety disorder that is defined as excessive worrying by a parent during the postpartum period. Beyond the scale of passing worries, PPA can cause extreme distress and interfere with the ability to function in daily life activities. PPA can manifest as the inability to sleep, eat, leave the house or enjoy time with one’s baby. Because the postpartum period is a big life transition - not easy for anyone - it is important to refrain from pathologizing all anxious feelings that arise during this phase. Sometimes, anxiety can be an appropriate response to situational circumstances. But healthy anxious feelings are temporary. PPA is distinct in that the anxiety is constant, pervasive and debilitating. While either parent can have PPA - or even both at the same time - it is more common for the birthing parent, possibly due to the hormonal fluctuations and physical demands for the birthing parent during the postpartum period.

Postpartum timeline

The postpartum period is conventionally considered to be six weeks long, and further divided into phases measured from hours to weeks post-birth. However, some consider it to last a full year following birth.

Initial/acute

The 12 hours following birth, a time of rapid change with risks for complications such as eclampsia (when a person with preeclampsia during pregnancy develops seizures)

Subacute

The 6 weeks following birth, continued - though not as rapid - changes in hemodynamics (how blood flows through the body), genitourinary recovery, metabolism, and emotional state

Delayed

The 12 months following birth, continued - even more gradual - changes in the body, such as the restoration of muscle tone and connective tissue to the prepregnant state

Prevalence and impact

- 10% of birthing parents experience PPA, compared to 6% who have anxiety while pregnant.
- On the anxiety spectrum, more severe PPA - with intrusive, irrational and upsetting thoughts that cannot be escaped without engaging in repetitive behaviors - happens in 3-5% of birthing parents.
- PPA is slightly less common than PPD, which is experienced by more than 15% of birthing parents.
- Broadly speaking, perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADS) are the number one complication associated with childbirth, and the second-leading cause of maternal mortality [Romm, *Perinatal*].
- PMADS can interfere with the ability of a parent to bond with their baby during this special time.

Comparison to baby blues and postpartum depression

The “baby blues” are a common experience following birth due to the rapid decrease in hormones. This condition can cause feelings of sadness and overwhelm. In comparison to PPA, symptoms of the baby blues are mild and last for only a couple of weeks. It is important to pay attention to whether the symptoms persist beyond a 2-week period, and whether they become debilitating, in which case PPA could be happening.

PPA and PPD have some overlapping symptoms, such as trouble relaxing and sleeping, and irritability. PPD is characterized as “long-lasting and potentially severe feelings of sadness and hopelessness” (Mihaela). It is not unusual for individuals experiencing PPD to also have anxiety, but not all individuals experiencing PPA are depressed. Because PPA and PPD may respond differently to treatment, it is key to understand which mood disorder the person is experiencing, in order to provide better support.

Complications of PPA

For some individuals, PPA can lead to panic attacks or symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Panic attacks are acute episodes of extreme anxiety accompanied by physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat and dizziness. Obsessions are unwanted, intrusive thoughts, which may inspire compulsions: repetitive and uncontrollable behaviors intended to relieve distress, but usually unhelpful [Collier]. While the term *OCD* is often used casually, true OCD is when obsessions and compulsions occur to a degree that is disabling. In the postpartum period, OCD could manifest as checking the baby’s temperature repeatedly or the inability to sleep at night due to staying up to make sure that the baby is always breathing.

PPA can spike in reaction to real stressors, such as any health issues with the baby, difficulty with lactation, financial trouble or shifting family relationships. In addition, PPA can worsen in response to weaning, which causes a drop in both oxytocin - the “bonding” hormone - and prolactin - the “calm” hormone.

Causes of PPA

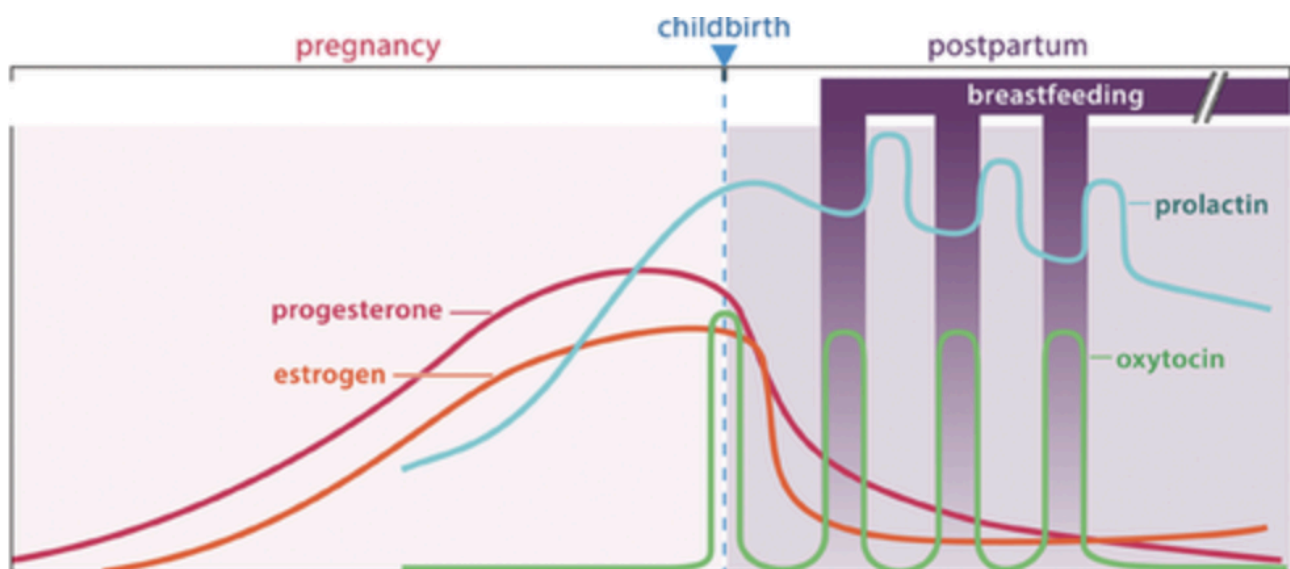
PPA usually arises from a combination of factors rather than from a single cause. As with any anxiety disorder, the occurrence of PPA typically results from a predisposition to anxiety, *plus* a triggering event or set of circumstances that provoke the anxiety. However, even individuals without a history of anxiety can develop PPA, due to the extreme demands of taking care of a new baby, combined with any or all of the potential contributing factors listed below.

Sleep deprivation

The lack of sleep alone can trigger anxiety and exacerbate pre-existing anxiety. One way that a lack of sleep can increase anxiety is by impacting hormones, which can impair sleep physiologically. Sleep deprivation can decrease levels of both serotonin - which incites feelings of happiness - and melatonin, which helps the body and mind wind down to rest for the night [Copperstate].

Hormonal changes

Immediately following birth there is a sudden drop in estrogen and progesterone, and a simultaneous surge in oxytocin. The oxytocin helps to instill a “motherly” instinct during this initial time of bonding, boosting the positive feelings associated with love. Then, as this first surge fades away, the person may begin to experience feelings of anxiety or depression [Copperstate]. For some, the immediate period following birth is not immune from mood swings, especially if the birth was traumatic or resulted in complications requiring recuperation beyond the recovery already required by childbirth. Birthing parents who lactate will continue to get subsequent pulses of “feel-good” hormones during lactation. Prolactin - which calms - is released to “stimulate milk production between feedings” and oxytocin - which helps to stimulate continued bonding - is prompted by the baby’s sucking on the breast and it initiates the “let-down” reflex that causes milk to flow for feedings [Kohl]. Then, three months following birth, hormones begin to stabilize, returning to pre-pregnancy levels. By six months postpartum, hormones have usually reached their baseline. However, cortisol - a stress hormone - can rise at the same time, due to the stressors of having a new baby, including sleep deprivation [Copperstate]. While prolactin and oxytocin can help to mitigate anxiety, the fluctuations of other hormones in the postpartum endocrine system - including cortisol and other stress hormones, possibly - can contribute to the occurrence of PPA or exacerbate it.



<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bies.201600159>

Stressful life events

Additional stress-inducing events - including a traumatic childbirth - can add to the baseline stress of welcoming a new life into the world and taking care of it. Furthermore, any stressors specific to an individual's set of circumstances can compound the experience of anxiety. Other stressors can include financial difficulties, strained relationships or work-life balance.

New responsibilities

Taking care of a new baby requires a significant amount of energy and labor. Adapting to this new responsibility can cause anxiety, especially for a first-time parent, particularly because it involves high stakes and it can *only* be figured out through trial and error. The newness often results in lots of mistakes along the way. For some individuals, especially perfectionist-types, this imperfect path can provoke anxiety. For those who already have children, welcoming a new baby brings a different and also potentially anxiety-making set of circumstances: juggling care for multiple children. And for some, the caretaking is further dispersed to not just children but also elders in the family. Any time there is a new family member, the relational dynamics shift and these transitions can cause interpersonal stress as relationships find their new footing.

Risk factors

Certain individuals are more prone to developing PPA if they enter parenthood with risk factors for anxiety, especially PPA specifically. The more risk factors that a person has, the more likely they are to experience PPA and the more extreme it can be. Common risk factors are listed below.

Predisposition to anxiety

A sensitive innate temperament can make a person more prone to experiencing anxiety.

Personal history of anxiety

A personal history with anxiety can set up triggers that cause present events to elicit more anxiety than they would otherwise. Once a neural pathway has been established for an anxious response, the brain is more likely to veer toward anxiety in the face of potential stressors, merely out of habit. The more reinforcement these pathways receive, the stronger they become and thus the more easily a person can feel triggered, especially if there are similarities between anxiety-provoking events in the past and the current stressors. Associations with prior events are the most likely to instigate or exacerbate PPA if the memories involve anxiety specific to childbirth or caretaking. Simply having one or more significant episodes of anxiety around caretaking can put a person at risk for PPA. Furthermore, a person is more vulnerable to feeling triggered if they are already experiencing emotional instability, whether from sleep deprivation, hormonal fluctuations or other stressors.

Family history of anxiety

A family history of anxiety can predispose a person to PPA because anxiety disorders tend to run in families. In addition to the genetic influence of a parent, the example they provide can be formative, especially if it occurs in early life, before the person has developed a critical mindset to assess their parent's emotional response to situations. For instance, if, from an early age a person watches their mother react anxiously to stressors, they can internalize her anxious response as the "right" way to interpret stressful situations, since modeling is one of the most powerful ways we learn anything. Anxious reactivity can become an automatic, learned response. Moreover, anxiety in the family raises the risk of developing PPA even more so if the anxiety was experienced by the person's birthing parent, and more so still if the anxiety was associated with giving birth or caretaking. Unfortunately, such modeled behavior can send the implicit message that having children is scary, which can prime a person to experience their own anxiety when they themselves have children.

Insufficient social support

"It takes a village." Giving birth and raising children requires a lot of support for the parents, especially the birthing parent, for whom the experience is obviously quite physical. Under ideal circumstances, the birthing parent will have attentive healthcare providers, helpful family living nearby, a supportive social circle and a dedicated partner all available to help as needed. In the postpartum period, support can look like assistance preparing meals, washing dishes and laundry, holding the baby, giving a massage and even just listening as the parent processes their experience. The lack of such support can leave a person feeling overwhelmed and stressed as a result. Lack of support can be especially harmful when it leads a person to feel that their life is out of control, since predictability is a cornerstone to mental health. Stress from inadequate support can be cumulative, causing a person's mental health to break down over time, which can finally manifest as PPA.

Past experience of losing a pregnancy or child, or a trauma related to caretaking

Any past trauma related to caretaking - such as the loss of a pregnancy or child, or the serious illness of another child - can paint a person's perspective around caretaking as precarious and even frightening. Traumatic past experiences can cause a person to feel hypervigilant regarding the birth and caretaking of a new child. Traumatic is a relative term, defined by a person's unique emotional experience of an event. Certain events - such as illness - may feel traumatic to some but not others, making the experience of anxiety and PPA highly individualized. Furthermore, any history of trauma - even unrelated to caretaking - can make a person more prone to developing PPA.

Having a baby with a health condition

A baby with a health condition can add further stress to the experience of having a new child because managing adverse health conditions increases the responsibilities for parents, which can lead to feeling overwhelmed. Furthermore, concern over the health of one's child can be one of the most anxiety-provoking feelings because it taps into primal worries over survival. Health conditions can also be unpredictable, which, as mentioned earlier, can make a situation even harder to bear. In addition, the extra care required for health conditions can strain the relationships between parents and between parents and other children, who may receive less attention as a result. Finally, in this capitalist system, health conditions can unfortunately be very costly, adding a material stressor to the picture and increasing the risk for developing PPA.

Caring for multiple children (or elders)

Lastly, there is an increased load of caretaking responsibilities for parents who take care of older children - or multiple babies, such as twins! - and/or elders in the family, such as their own aging parents. This additional caretaking work can result in more stressors and *less* time for self-care, including the basics of adequate nutrition, sleep and attending to one's own health needs, both physical and mental. Over time, and without sufficient support, such strain can deplete a person's reserves and make them more likely to feel stressed by their situation. The more that stress accumulates and is left untreated, the more vulnerable a person is to developing PPA.

Body Systems Affected

As an anxiety disorder, PPA is foremost a condition of the nervous system, but it can also manifest with symptoms in other body systems, due to the interconnectedness of mind and body and all body systems.

Nervous system, central

As the primary location of the mind inside the body, the central nervous system is highly impacted by PPA. It is from here that fearful thoughts send signals to the rest of the body, telling it to prepare for danger, which can manifest as a racing heart, tense muscles and stuck digestion. Anxious narratives typical of PPA can keep a parent awake at night, constantly watching their baby's breathing, or stop them from accepting childcare, for fear of leaving the baby in anyone else's hands, even their partner's.

- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Nightmares
- Panic attacks
- Inability to relax
- Lapses in memory
- Difficulty concentrating
- Looping or intrusive thoughts
- Ambient and persistent worrying
- Anticipation of worst-case scenarios
- Obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors

Nervous system, autonomic

The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary actions such as breathing, heart rate, blood pressure and digestion. PPA can stimulate somatic responses to anxiety.

- Dry mouth
- Tremoring
- Eyelid twitching
- Paleness or flushing (turning red and hot)
- Raising of hair
- Sweating

Immune system

The immune system can already be in an impaired sleep in the postpartum period due to sleep deprivation. In addition, overexertion of the sympathetic nervous system - fight-or-flight - can weaken immunity over time.

- Frequent colds
- Reactivation of viruses, such as cold sore flare ups

Digestive system

Many people experience stress in their digestive systems since a state of fight-or-flight slows down digestion. This can manifest as chronic digestive upset if the stress is constant. Additionally, stress can cause some individuals to lose their appetites and others to overeat to soothe their emotions.

- Nausea
- Heartburn
- Indigestion
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty swallowing
- Overeating or emotional eating
- Bloating, burping or flatulence
- Constipation
- Diarrhea

Cardiovascular system

Anxiety can stress the heart and vasculature by putting extra pressure on the cardiovascular system.

- Faintness
- Chest pain (or tightness)
- Heart palpitations ~ feeling of a racing or pounding heartbeat
- Hypertension ~ high blood pressure = over 140/90
- Hypotension ~ low blood pressure = under 90/60

Musculoskeletal system

For some, anxiety immediately turns into physical tension in the body, which can result in stiffness and pain.

- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Restlessness
- Jaw clenching or grinding teeth
- Muscle tension and stiffness
- Joint or nerve pain

Respiratory system

Because it enables breath, the respiratory system is impacted by PPA in the ways that anxiety can impair proper breathing. When short of breath, overall body function can be suboptimal due to insufficient oxygen.

- Sighing
- Holding the breath
- Shortness of breath
- Pressure/constriction in the chest
- Allergy flare-ups or asthma attacks

The list of symptoms above are largely informed by herbalist Michael Hoffman's "Symptoms of anxiety" [Hoffman, *Medicinal herbalism*, 348].

Common Hardships

Reaching out

Asking for help can be hard. Some people struggle to admit they need help and others lack the social support needed to offer help. Additionally, without education around PPA, a person going through it may not even realize that what they are experiencing has a name and various treatments. Education is needed! Herbalists can be on the lookout for signs of PPA in their postpartum clients and help to educate them on this condition, as well as the various care options, including herbal allies, sleep support and therapy. The role of the educator is not to be underestimated, since awareness - especially if provided in a non-shaming way - can make the difference between suffering and receiving the proper help.

Making space for self-care

Anyone with children understands how challenging it can be to integrate basic self-care while taking care of a baby, particularly a newborn. The challenge of self-care for PPA is further compounded by both the additional care needed to treat the condition combined with the impaired ability to function in daily activities: the person needs more but can do less. Therefore, it can be helpful - even essential - to have support in order to carry out self-care. This is especially helpful during the first six weeks of the postpartum period, when the birthing parent is recovering from birth and their movement may be limited. Help can come from a partner, family or friends - whoever can make tea, prepare a bath, give a massage or take a turn holding the baby.

When suggesting interventions for PPA, herbalists must be sensitive to the challenge of postpartum self-care and ask whether each suggestion is do-able, with questions such as, "Are you able to make tea or do you have anyone who can help you?" and "Is there anyone who can hold your baby while you take a bath?" Furthermore, herbalists can stress the importance of taking the time for self-care and recovery in order to fortify oneself for childcare. Parents sometimes need reminding that their own wellbeing serves their children.

Modern Medical Approach

Treatments

A modern medical approach to PPA often includes pharmaceutical drugs, sometimes combined with therapy. Drugs typically prescribed for PPA are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) - antidepressants - and benzodiazepines, which are anxiolytics. Occasionally, other psychiatric drugs may be used to treat PPA but these have worse side effects so they tend to be avoided, especially in the case of lactating people, in order to protect the baby. Such other drugs include tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) or norepinephrine and dopamine reuptake inhibitors (NDRIs) [Cleveland Clinic, *Postpartum anxiety*].

For people with PPA, SSRIs are the most common drug because they have lower side effects. However, because it can take up four to six weeks for people to feel the impact of SSRIs [Worth], doctors sometimes prescribe benzodiazepines - which act faster against anxiety - while waiting for SSRIs to kick in [Collier]. SSRIs work by blocking the reabsorption of serotonin, which keeps levels of serotonin - a mood-boosting neurotransmitter - circulating in the brain, and this helps maintain a pleasant mood [Mayo Clinic]. In contrast, benzodiazepines work by stimulating the brain to release the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which slows down the nervous system. Slowed nervous system activity has a variety of numbing effects: preventing the creation of new memories, quieting the nerves and inducing sleepiness, all of which can help in reducing symptoms of anxiety [Cleveland Clinic, *Benzodiazepines*], if not its root cause.

Therapy is also sometimes included in the modern medical approach to PPA. Many healthcare practitioners recognize that for certain individuals, medications are “more effective when combined with therapy” [Collier]. Of the many different forms of therapy, doctors often recommend cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) because, according to multiple studies, “CBT has been demonstrated to be as effective as, or even more effective than other forms of psychological therapy or psychiatric medications” [APA]. CBT is based on the principles that psychological problems stem from learned patterns of self-defeating thoughts and behaviors, which can be unlearned through specific therapeutic strategies. Individual therapists use different tactics of CBT, such as learning to recognize thought patterns that are negatively distorted, facing fears rather than avoiding them, and developing relaxation techniques to “calm the mind and relax the body” [APA].

Common medication side effects

All psychiatric medications have side effects and “all psychiatric medications are excreted into the breast milk” [Collier]. Therefore, prescribing medications to lactating people requires a delicate balance between treating the person to improve their condition while attempting to minimize negative side effects for both them *and* their baby, as much as possible. Herbal interventions and other holistic modalities are useful to consider as alternatives to the modern medical approach in order to avoid the side effects of pharmaceutical drugs.

SSRIs are the most commonly prescribed psychiatric medications for PPA because they have fewer side effects than other such drugs, and yet they still pose risk factors for both the person taking them and their baby, if the person is lactating. Possible side effects of SSRIs include: dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, nervousness, agitation, restlessness, dizziness, headache, drowsiness, insomnia, reduced libido, or changes in appetite that can lead to either losing or gaining weight. Additionally, a rare but dangerous side effect is the increased suicide risk, especially for people under age 25 and during the first few weeks of taking the drug or when changing dosage. Theoretically, this can happen because taking SSRIs renews the ability to carry out intentions, which, for depressed or anxious individuals can include plans of suicide that they were unable to act upon when they could not function as well. The first few weeks are the most risky because this is a time of overlap between the renewed capacity to act and the lingering feelings of depression or anxiety that can remain for the first four to six weeks of taking an SSRI. Healthcare practitioners should closely monitor this sensitive period for worsening symptoms, unusual behavior or signs of suicidal ideation [Mayo Clinic].

Other serious considerations for SSRIs include drug and herbal interactions, as well as the necessary precautions to take when discontinuing use. SSRIs can increase the risk of bleeding, especially if taken with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like aspirin and ibuprofen, or blood thinners, including herbal blood thinners such as garlic and ginkgo. When SSRIs are combined with other drugs or herbs that increase

serotonin in the brain, serotonin syndrome (SS) can occur, which results from an excessive level of serotonin that can cause anxiety, agitation, tremors, rapid heart rate, major changes in blood pressure or a high fever. Signs of SS call for urgent medical attention. St. John's Wort is one herb that can increase serotonin levels and is thus contraindicated with SSRIs. Additionally, when treatment stops, discontinuation syndrome can occur, causing withdrawal symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, lethargy and general uneasiness. Safely discontinuing requires gradual weaning under medical guidance [Mayo Clinic]. Herbalists can support the weaning process with safe nervines to ease symptoms of withdrawal, such as fresh milky oat tops.

For lactating parents taking SSRIs, the medications appear to pose fewer adverse effects for their babies than for the parents taking the medications, especially when drugs are taken cautiously. Of all psychiatric medications, SSRIs have been studied the most regarding their impact on breastfed babies. Numerous factors determine the amount of a drug that reaches a breastfed baby: dosage size, infant age and feeding schedule [MGH]. Given that these variables make a difference in the baby's exposure to a drug, parents can take steps to minimize drug exposure for their babies. Precautions include using the lowest effective dose of a medication. In addition, for older infants whose feedings can be spaced out by several hours, avoid nursing during the period in which the medication is at its peak in breast milk. Pump and discard that milk, if possible. The timing varies for different medications. For instance, paroxetine (Paxil) peaks in breast milk eight hours after the parent has taken the medication. Encouragingly, studies on sertraline (Zoloft) "indicate that this approach leads to a 20% reduction in the amount of medication to which the infant is exposed" [Nonacs]. However, for newborns or babies fed on demand, it may not be possible to time feedings around dosages, and thus those babies may be more at risk for developing side effects from medications. Newborns - as well as premature babies - are also more vulnerable to medication side effects because they "have a diminished capacity to metabolize medications for at least the first two weeks of life" [Burt]. When assessing the vulnerability of premature babies, this two-week period must be adjusted according to their gestational age.

On balance, given the many benefits of breastfeeding, SSRI use is relatively safe for breastfed babies who are over 2-weeks old, as long as the lactating parent takes the lowest effective dose and especially if they adjust the feeding schedule around dosage. Studies have shown that drug levels in these babies were "low to undetectable" with the following relative amounts found excreted into breast milk for different medications (lowest to highest): Fluvoxamine (Luvox) 1.3%, Paroxetine (Paxil) 2.1%, Sertraline (Zoloft) 2.2%, Citalopram (Celexa), Escitalopram (Lexapro and CipraleX) 3.6%, and Fluoxetine (Prozac) 6.8% [Tripathi]. Furthermore, it appears that at drug levels this low, "significant complications" are rare for babies, with no reports of "serious adverse events related to exposure to these medications" [MGH]. A small number of reports have suggested that "jitteriness, irritability, excessive crying, sleep disturbance and feeding problems" may correlate to SSRI use by lactating parents, but "in many cases it has not been possible to establish a causal link between such events and exposure to medications" [MGH]. If babies exposed to SSRIs exhibit such behavioral changes following SSRI use by the parent, it may be helpful to measure and monitor drug levels in these babies.

Further reassurance regarding the safety of SSRIs for breastfed babies in the postpartum period is that babies exposed to these medications appear to have minimal long-term side effects at ages 1.5, 3 and 5 years, according to longitudinal data from the Norwegian Mother, Father and Child Cohort Study. The data included 61,081 mother-child dyads, of whom 177 (2%) of the mothers received SSRI treatment at the time the babies were six months old. This study on SSRI exposure reviewed treatment for PPD specifically, but the results may be applicable to PPA, theoretically, since both are mood disorders that can interfere with parent-child relationships. Study authors found that SSRI treatment had improved maternal satisfaction at six months postpartum, and this improvement persisted when later measured again when the children were 1.5, 3 and 5 years old. In addition, the authors found that postnatal SSRI treatment reduced the incidence of subsequent maternal depression, and also increased partner relationship satisfaction. Regarding the impact on the children involved, SSRI treatment appears to have mitigated behavioral problems associated with PPD, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), up to 5 years after childbirth. The long view offered by this study suggests that the appropriate use of SSRIs may reduce the risk of "adverse maternal and child outcomes associated with [PPD]" [Chaoyu] and possibly PPA, by extension. Considering the significant risk factors posed by postpartum mood disorders - such as extreme distress, inability to function, and potential disconnection between parent and child - the relatively low risks of SSRIs make a strong case for their temporary use when a lack of treatment would result in greater harm to parent and child.

A caveat to consider is that these studies focus on the impact of SSRIs taken by lactating parents during the postnatal period, rather than the long-term effects of SSRI chronic use on breastfed babies. Therefore, it is important to only apply the reassuring results of these studies to the acute use of SSRIs postpartum, and *not* assume safety for breastfed babies exposed to longer use of SSRIs (for babies who breastfeed longer term). Ultimately, the results remain reassuring, given that the postpartum period can be one of the most delicate times for mental health, which means that a lactating parent might only need to take the medication in the short-term and thus avoid potential long term side effects for both themselves and their breastfed baby.

From a different drug class - anxiolytics - benzodiazepines are sometimes used for PPA in the short-term, while SSRIs take effect. Benzodiazepines have more severe side effect risks than SSRIs, suggesting that they only be taken as a last resort for PPA, when the benefits outweigh the risks, such as when medication side effects pose less danger than PPA. As with SSRIs, benzodiazepines have more side effect risks for the lactating parent than for the breastfed baby. For the parent, side effects include the potential for misuse since they can be habit-forming (unlike SSRIs, which are not addictive), dangerous interactions with alcohol and certain other drugs (opioid pain medications), and slowed reaction time, making them unsafe to take while doing activities requiring rapid reactivity, such as driving. They can also cause withdrawal symptoms when discontinued [Cleveland Clinic, *Benzodiazepines*]. The biggest danger is overdose, which can slow nervous system activity too much and, in the extreme, have fatal effects [Collier]. Breastfed babies are mostly spared side effect risks of benzodiazepines because of the small amount of medication excreted into breast milk (oxazepam 1%, alprazolam 8%), as well as the short half-life compared to other psychiatric drugs [Monogr]. Some cases have been reported of “sedation, poor feeding and respiratory distress” in breastfed babies, but aggregated results of multiple studies have indicated “a relatively low incidence of adverse effects in infants exposed to benzodiazepines in breast milk” [MGH]. For babies, withdrawal symptoms are the greatest risk, especially if the parent has been taking the medication long-term. Therefore, when benzodiazepine use is discontinued, it is recommended to closely monitor breastfed babies for signs of sedation [Monogr]. Due to the greater risks they pose for both parent and baby, benzodiazepines should be used with caution, and only short-term whenever possible. The riskier nature of benzodiazepines highlights an area where herbs may help: in cases of PPA warranting SSRI use, herbal interventions may provide an alternative approach for relieving anxiety in a person while they wait for four to six weeks for SSRIs to take effect.

This paper focuses on side effects of just SSRIs and benzodiazepines, since they are the most commonly prescribed for PPA, due to their lower side effect risks for breastfed babies. Although these medications do not pose high risks for babies, relatively speaking, certain other psychiatric medications should be avoided by lactating parents unless absolutely necessary, such as the antipsychotic Clozapine, because of potential sedation and cardiovascular instability, and lithium (used for manic depressive disorder), because of toxicity [Monogr]. For more information on the safety or danger of psychiatric medication use during lactation, please refer to this [table](#) created by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [Armstrong].

Other problems with the modern medical approach

While psychiatric medications may numb anxious feelings, they do not deal with the root causes of anxiety. Sometimes, extreme PPA calls for the temporary relief brought by these drugs, as a matter of survival. One possible role for the herbalist is to support clients in the transition to herbal interventions from the acute use of SSRIs. Well educated herbalists can also guide clients toward other alternative modalities to treat anxiety, such as bodywork and professional mental healthcare.

For people with PPA, CBT is the form of therapy often recommended by the modern medical approach. CBT tends to emphasize negative thinking patterns as the primary cause of psychological problems, and it works toward the establishment of positive thinking patterns as the remedy. While thoughts play a significant role in mental health, a broader perspective posits that somatic work is also necessary to improve overall well being because anxiety and trauma can be held in the body, and thoughts alone are not always sufficient to release longstanding patterns of physical tension. If a person does CBT therapy, it may benefit them to supplement with the integration of simple therapeutic somatic practices into their daily lives, such as doing breathwork while nursing. Alternative, body-based therapies include eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), which can help to process and recover from traumatic memories. EMDR is especially helpful for PPA if trauma has contributed to anxiety. (See *Holistic Approach* below for more information on therapy.)

Harm reduction

For clarity, it must be said that although the holistic approach - including herbal interventions - may be preferable in order to avoid the side effects of psychiatric drugs, there are times when SSRIs and temporary benzodiazepines are clinically warranted. There is no shame in taking such medications when the positives outweigh the potential side effects, such as when PPA is debilitating, disrupts the relationship between the parent and baby, or risks turning into postpartum psychosis. When needed, these drugs can provide harm reduction. It is essential for herbalists to keep an open mind and support each client's unique path.

Holistic Approach

The holistic approach brings an integrative mindset to PPA and it prioritizes alternative healing modalities, such as herbal interventions. Holistic practitioners tend to take a broad view of a client's situation, beyond their PPA symptoms, in order to understand possible root causes for anxiety and contributing factors such as a personal or family history of anxiety, as well as sleep, nutrition, movement and social support, or the lack of any of these nourishments needed for optimal health. Herbalists pay attention to interconnections between the nervous system and other body systems, and strive to support the whole person: mental and physical. One benefit of herbal interventions is that they pose less adverse side effect risks for the client and their baby, as long as safe herbs are selected and safe dosages are taken. Over the long term, the holistic approach has the potential for deeper healing because it addresses causes and tends to interrelated systems in the body, while causing no damage or less severe side effects than pharmaceutical drugs.

Herbs

Herbs can support many aspects of wellbeing, including mental health. Many herbs have actions specific to relieving anxiety. Some of these same herbs can support the health of other body systems that relate to the nervous system, such as the digestive and cardiovascular systems. Thoughtfully selected herbs can provide integrative support to both mind and body. Herbs may also be more affordable for some people, thus enabling greater access. And with fewer side effects than psychiatric medications, herbs can bring relief from PPA without risking the harm of both parent and baby. See below for more details on herbal interventions.

Breathwork

Breathwork is a simple, accessible and free relaxation technique. Slowed breathing can help to slow down nervous system activity and thus ease anxiety and its symptoms, such as insomnia. Breathwork has many other health benefits, such as boosting the immune system, lowering blood pressure, stimulating circulation and improving digestion [Nash]. In addition, it can help to manage physical pain and tension, the relief of which can also help to alleviate anxiety. Like anything, the more one practices breathwork, the easier it becomes and the more likely one may turn to it as a coping skill in the face of stressors. The calming hormones triggered by breastfeeding can make breathwork easier, making this a great time to build a habit of breathwork. There are a variety of different styles of breathwork, including box breathing, circular breathing and diaphragmatic breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing helps to stimulate the vagus nerve and thus the parasympathetic - rest and digest - nervous system. One method for this breathwork is to inhale for four seconds through the nose, deep into the belly, then hold for two seconds, and then breathe out for six seconds, slowly through the mouth, repeating until reaching a state of calm. See this [video](#) from UCLA Health for instructions. Relaxing herbs can help in reaching the right mindset for practicing breathwork. Such herbs include Vervain, chamomile, lemon balm, milky oats, motherwort, passionflower and skullcap.

Restorative sleep

Sleep is essential for health. It is a time of cellular repair, hormone regulation and immune system activity. However, anyone with children knows how elusive adequate sleep can be, especially in the newborn phase. The old saying to "sleep when the baby sleeps" remains good advice for parents taking care of only one child. Napping with the baby or going to bed early - at the same time as the baby - can be helpful for catching up on sleep, even if one can only do this some of the time. Sleep must be prioritized over less essential matters like cleaning the house because health is ultimately more important (and this is just a phase). If a person cannot sleep during the day, even resting can help to recharge the nervous system. Sleep at night can be improved by developing good sleep hygiene, which can include not looking at screens in the hour

before bed, allowing time to wind down, and making the bedroom a dark, cool place that feels safe and is reserved for sleep and intimacy. If anxiety leads to insomnia, breathwork and relaxing herbs can promote the relaxation that enables restorative sleep. Herbs that support sleep include Vervain, chamomile, lemon balm, milky oats, motherwort, passionflower and skullcap. These herbs can be taken before bed and during night wakings to promote falling back asleep. In addition, taken in smaller amounts throughout the day, these herbs can help to tonify the nervous system, which can mitigate the stress response and thus make it easier to transition into sleep at night. Magnesium taken before bed can also help with sleep by relaxing the body.

Movement activities

Movement supports mental health overall and can help to reduce anxiety. Moving the body can release stress, ease physical tension and promote a state of mindfulness, all of which can improve mood. Many different types of movement are beneficial, from simply walking to more aerobic activities such as running or dance. The best choice for any person is movement that they enjoy because this makes it easy to sustain as a habit. Regular movement can help to lower stress hormones, such as cortisol, which can lead to an improved ability to cope with stress. In the first six weeks postpartum, birthing parents are in a state of recovery, which calls for gentle rather than rigorous movement. Generally safe activities at this time include basic stretching and short walks, depending on one's state of recuperation. Taking it slow is key. Movement for stress management is not about "bouncing back" to a pre-pregnancy body, as that societal pressure can add to anxiety rather than relieve it. Rhythmic movement that doubles as a relaxation technique - such as yoga or tai chi - can be especially helpful in alleviating anxiety. After the initial six weeks postpartum, a person can usually resume a greater range of movement activities, such as swimming, biking or sports. In cases of PPA, the more engaging the movement activity, the more potential it has to refocus away from anxiety. But this is not about distraction; it is about cultivating mindfulness in the present, tangible moment.

Bodywork modalities

Bodywork involves therapeutic techniques that work directly with the body for a range of both physical and mental benefits, including improved posture and circulation, pain reduction and a heightened awareness of the mind-body connection. There are many different modalities of bodywork, such as massage, acupuncture and chiropractics - the latter indicated when misalignment (common after giving birth) can lead to tension and pain. At its most basic level, bodywork eases physical tension, which can promote an overall feeling of relaxation. Feeling at ease and without pain in one's body can help to reduce anxiety because it is easier to feel calm in the mind when one feels physically relaxed. Conversely, any amount of physical tension or pain can worsen or even trigger anxiety. As with movement, it matters to find the match between the individual and the modality. For helping with PPA, bodywork should not be anything that contributes to stress. For some individuals with a history of trauma, therapy involving touch can be triggering and should be approached cautiously so it does not exacerbate anxiety. When intense touch is unhelpful, there are other forms of bodywork that utilize light touch - such as craniosacral therapy - or no touch at all, such as aromatherapy. The ultimate goal of bodywork is to improve the mechanics of one's body and the sensation of embodying it, whether through relaxation, enhanced energy flow, proper alignment and/or decreased pain.

Professional mental health support

Professional mental health support - therapy in its various forms - is sometimes needed to treat PPA. Therapy involves meeting with a practitioner to discuss, understand and hopefully improve mental health, including thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Therapy can complement psychiatric medication and/or holistic approaches, such as herbal interventions and bodywork. There are different kinds of practitioners and a variety of therapy styles. Therapists include marriage and family counselors (who hold master's degrees), clinical psychologists (who hold doctorates), and others who provide alternatives such as art or music therapy. Professional guidance can be very helpful in navigating mental disorders because therapists bring their expertise, experience and extensive training based on proven positive results. Ideally, therapy presents a safe, nonjudgmental space in which to talk about one's experience, and this can distinguish it from talking with friends and family. Additionally, a therapist's training enables them to guide a person in navigating mental health problems more effectively and efficiently than they likely could without professional help. With anxiety, including PPA, receiving therapy can make the difference between making progress and stagnancy. In such cases, professional mental health support can be a necessary part of the healing process.

Social network

Having a supportive social network can be one of the most helpful ways to manage anxiety, especially postpartum, when people rely on the help of others. Social support can come in the form of a dedicated partner, good friends who care to really listen and family who loves a person unconditionally. Help in the postpartum period can go a long way in reducing anxiety because it can shorten the mental to-do list that can contribute to feeling overwhelmed. Help can also free up time to sleep when the baby naps (instead of washing dishes and folding laundry). The ability to ask for help is important because it lightens the load in the ways one really needs, whether that's help with grocery shopping, household chores or holding the baby.

Additionally, one's social network can expand at this time to include support groups of people going through similar experiences at the same time, such as a regular gathering of new parents or parents of newborns or parents experiencing perinatal mood disorders. A support group can be as small as just one other person, and it can be informal, such as meeting other parents at the playground. The more specific the similarities within a support group, the more therapeutic it can be to spend time together because connecting over shared experiences can validate one's own emotions and help one to feel less alone. Another benefit of a support group is that its members can share different coping strategies, thus empowering each other. A sense of commonality can contribute to healing. Conversely, feeling isolated can lead to hopelessness if one believes that no one else has ever made it through such an experience, and such despair can worsen mood disorders. On the other hand, seeing others who have successfully navigated a difficult postpartum phase can give one hope that there is a more emotionally stable life possible beyond challenges such as PPA.

Herbalist Guidelines for Supporting Clients with PPA

- All herbs must be safe during lactation for lactating clients and their babies.
- Have referrals ready for professional mental health support in case the client desires it.
- Track changes in anxiety from visit to visit by asking the client to rate their anxiety on a scale of 1-10.
- Watch for symptoms of PPP at each visit: hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, paranoia, agitation, irritability, thoughts of harming oneself or others [Cleveland Clinic, *Postpartum psychosis*].
- When suggesting herbal interventions, aim for quick, simple preparations that are easy to integrate.
- For each herbal intervention recommended, ask whether carrying it out is realistic in their situation; and if not, revise recommendation collaboratively, prioritizing ease of use to support compliance.
- Specifically for herbal interventions, ask the client if they have anyone to help them prepare herbs.
- For other support, such as baths, ask the client if they have anyone to help take care of their baby.
- Encourage the client to see themselves as worthy of self-care amidst their own role as a caretaker.
- Remind the client how important self-care is for not just them but also for their baby's wellbeing.
- Offer a kind, nonjudgmental space for the client to share anything about their mental health.
- Keep an open mind to the client's chosen path, even if it deviates from one's own ideals.
- Ask the client whether they have social support, especially other friends with babies.
- Also ask the client what in their life they can shed to reduce overall stress.

Body Systems Supported by Herbs

Anxiety can trigger stress-induced symptoms in all body systems, first of all: the nervous system. If stress contributes to a health issue, relaxing nervine herbs can help to mitigate the problem, alongside other herbs with actions indicated for specific manifestations in the body. See the section *Herbal Actions* for definitions of each herbal action indicated and examples of herbs with those actions. Furthermore, many nervine herbs have affinities to particular body systems, making them the herbs of choice when anxiety manifests in those areas. In the lists below, relaxing nervines are underlined to highlight crossover indications.

Nervine Spectrum

Nervine is a broad class of herbs that nourish the nervous system. Some nervines are stimulating - such as Rosemary, Green Tea - while others are relaxing: Chamomile, California Poppy.* There is a spectrum of strength in the sedating effect of different relaxing nervines [Hoffman, *Medical herbalism*, 519]. Additionally, some of the same herbs can offer either a relaxing, sedating or hypnotic effect (hypnotic being the strongest), depending upon the dosage quantity and frequency, as well as the constitution of the individual.

Mild: Catnip, Cramp Bark, Hawthorn, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Milky Oats, Red Clover, Rose, Tulsi

Medium: Black Cohosh, Chamomile, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hyssop, Linden, Motherwort, Pasque Flower, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, Vervain, Wood Betony

Strong: California Poppy, Hops, Passionflower, Valerian,* Wild Lettuce

Nervous system, central

Anxiety starts in the nervous system. Therefore, addressing anxiety requires care for the nerves. From an herbalist perspective, anxiety calls for relaxing nervines, as well as herbs with other actions that support the nervous system. Herbs can promote nervous system health generally, and provide acute relief for the specific symptoms of anxiety. Additionally, certain herbs can help to repair damaged nerve tissue that can occur from chronic stress or trauma. Restoration of the nerves can help to mitigate stress and relieve anxiety. The CNS is the terrain of thoughts and feelings, which send signals to the rest of the body. Anxious thoughts and feelings signal the body to assume a state of hyper-vigilance, including nervousness or irritability. Herbs that target the CNS can help to prevent or stop the initial anxiety before it has a cascade effect on the rest of the body, which can cause symptoms of anxiety such as a racing heart, muscle tension or loss of appetite.

Herbs supportive to nervous system health

Adaptogens: Ashwagandha, Astragalus, Licorice,* Reishi, Schisandra, Shatavari, Tulsi

Adrenal tonics: Astragalus, Licorice,* Nettle Leaf

Antidepressants: Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* Eleuthero, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Rosemary, St. John's Wort, Schisandra, Tulsi, Vervain

Antispasmodics: Black Cohosh,* Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Motherwort, Passionflower

Anxiolytics: Ashwagandha, Gotu Kola, Motherwort, Passionflower, Pasque Flower, Reishi, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*, Vervain

Endocrine tonics: Gotu Kola, Nettle Leaf, Milky Oats

Hormone regulators: Black Cohosh,* Dong Quai,* Licorice,* Red Clover, Vitex, Wild Yam

Hormone tonics: Ashwagandha, Raspberry Leaf

Hypnotic: California Poppy,* Hops, Passionflower, Valerian,* Wild Lettuce

Muscle relaxants: Black Cohosh,* Hops, White Peony*

Nervines: Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hyssop, Hops, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Passionflower, Reishi, Red Clover, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*, Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Lettuce, Wood Betony

Nervous system tonics: Ashwagandha, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Lavender, Milky Oats, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*, Valerian,* Vervain

Nootropics: Gotu Kola, Lavender, Rosemary

Postpartum tonics: Dong Quai,* Raspberry Leaf

Restoratives: Elderberry, Fenugreek, Milky Oats, Schisandra, Wild Yam

Sedative: Black Cohosh,* Chamomile, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hyssop, Linden, Motherwort, Pasque Flower, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*, Vervain, Wood Betony

Trophorestoratives to the nervous system: Milky Oats, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*

Uterine tonics (for additional postpartum support): Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Raspberry Leaf

Herbs supportive to central nervous system issues

Irritability: Anxiolytics, nervines

Insomnia: Anxiolytics, nervines

Nightmares: Anxiolytics, nervines

Panic attacks: Anxiolytics, nervines

Inability to relax: Anxiolytics, nervines

Lapses in memory: Anxiolytics, nervines, nootropics

Difficulty concentrating: Anxiolytics, nervines, nootropics

Looping or intrusive thoughts: Anxiolytics, nervines, sedatives

Ambient and persistent worrying: Anxiolytics, nervines, sedatives

Anticipation of worst-case scenarios: Anxiolytics, nervines, sedatives

Obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors: Anxiolytics, nervines, sedatives

Nervous system, autonomic

The ANS governs somatic responses to the thoughts and feelings instigated by the CNS. Anxiety can trigger bodily responses in preparation for perceived danger, and these sensations can then worsen anxiety in a negative feedback loop. Herbs that relax the body can therefore help to relax the mind.

Herbs supportive to autonomic nervous system issues

Dry mouth: Demulcents, nervines

Tremoring: Antispasmodics, nervines

Eyelid twitching: Antispasmodics, muscle relaxants, nervines

Paleness or flushing (turning red and hot): Circulatory stimulants, nervines

Raising of hair: Nervines

Sweating: Nervines

Immune system

Herbs can help to support deep immunity when anxiety suppresses this system. Additionally, herbs can help to boost immunity in response to an exposure to a contagious illness or in the acute phase of an illness.

Herbs supportive to immune system health

Adaptogens: Ashwagandha, Gogi Berry, Licorice, * Reishi, Schisandra, Shatavari, Tulsi

Immunomodulators: Ashwagandha, Astragalus, Licorice, * Reishi, Schisandra, Tulsi

Immunostimulants: Boneset, Calendula, Cat's Claw, Dong Quai, * Echinacea, Elderberry, Garlic, Gogi Berry, Spilanthes, Usnea, Yerba Mansa

Nutritives: Ashwagandha, Alfalfa, Burdock, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Gotu Kola, Horsetail, Marshmallow Root, Nettle Leaf, Oat Straw, Raspberry Leaf, Rose Hips, Wild Yam

Herbs supportive to immune system health for acute situations

Antibacterials: Black Walnut, Calendula, Garlic, Hyssop, Oregon Grape Root, St. John's Wort, Thyme, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Willow, Yerba Mansa

Antifungals: Barberry, Black Walnut, Calendula, Cardamom, Chamomile, Clove, Garlic, Lavender, Oregano, Oregon Grape Root, Spilanthes, Usnea

Antiseptics: Echinacea, Hops, Oregon Grape Root, Rosemary, St. John's Wort, Thyme, Turmeric, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Willow, Yarrow, Yerba Mansa, Yerba Santa

Antivirals: Calendula, Echinacea, Elderberry, Ginger, Hyssop, Lemon Balm, Licorice, * Mullein, St. John's Wort, Usnea, Uva Ursi

Diaphoretics: Black Cohosh, * Catnip, Hops, Linden, Passionflower, Peppermint, Vervain

Febrifuge: Catnip, Chamomile, Elder Flower, Ginger, Lemon Balm, Willow, Yarrow

Lymphatics: Calendula, Cleavers, Echinacea, Figwort, Red Clover, Red Root, Violet Leaf

Digestive system

Herbs can help to support digestion when anxiety disrupts the function of this system.

Herbs supportive to digestive system health

Adaptogens: Astragalus, Licorice, * Shatavari, Tulsi

Antacids: Dandelion Leaf, Marshmallow Root, Meadowsweet, Raspberry Leaf

Antiemetics: Chamomile, Fennel, Ginger, Peppermint, Raspberry Leaf

Anti-inflammatories: Calendula, Chamomile, Ginger, Licorice, Marshmallow Root, Meadowsweet, Peppermint, Plantain, St. John's Wort, * Turmeric, Wild Yam

Antispasmodics: Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Dill Seed, Fennel, Ginger, Hops, Lemon Balm, Oregano, Passionflower, Peppermint, Skullcap, Thyme, Valerian, * Wild Yam

Aperients: Burdock, Dandelion Root, Dong Quai, * Elderberry, Ginger, Yellow Dock

Appetite stimulants: Gotu Kola (mild), Milk Thistle, Orange Peel

Astringents: Meadowsweet, Plantain, Raspberry Leaf, Thyme, Yarrow

Bitters: Artichoke Leaf, Blessed Thistle, Chamomile, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Hops, Lavender, Milk Thistle, Motherwort, Orange Peel, Oregon Grape Root, Reishi, Rosemary, Skullcap, Turmeric, Vervain, Willow, Wood Betony, Yarrow, Yellow Dock

Carminatives: Catnip, Chamomile, Cinnamon, Coriander, Cumin, Dill Seed, Fennel, Fenugreek, Ginger, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, Peppermint, Rosemary, Thyme, Turmeric, Valerian,* Wood Betony, Yarrow

Demulcents: Marshmallow Root, Licorice,* Plantain

Hepatics: Artichoke Leaf, Burdock, Dandelion Root, Oregon Grape Root, St. John's Wort, Vervain, Yellow Dock

Hypoglycemics: Black Cohosh,* Cinnamon, Garlic, Nettle Leaf, Turmeric, Wild Lettuce

Nervines: Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Hops, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Valerian*

Vulneraries: Calendula, Marshmallow Root, Plantain

Manifestations of anxiety in the digestive system and herbal actions indicated to help

Nausea: Antiemetics, antispasmodics, nervines

Heartburn: Antacids, demulcents, nervines

Indigestion: Antispasmodics, bitters, carminatives, hepatics, nervines

Loss of appetite: Appetite stimulants, bitters, nervines

Difficulty swallowing: Demulcents, nervines

Overeating or emotional eating: Adaptogens, hypoglycemics, nervines

Bloating, burping or flatulence: Antispasmodics, carminatives, nervines

Constipation: Aperients, bitters, hepatics, nervines

Diarrhea: Astringents (especially Raspberry Leaf), nervines

Cardiovascular system

Herbs can help to support the heart and vasculature when anxiety puts extra pressure on this system.

Herbs supportive to cardiovascular system health

Adaptogens: Reishi, Tulsi

Analgesics: California Poppy,* Motherwort, Passionflower, Reishi, Turmeric, Willow

Blood tonics: Astragalus, Dong Quai,* Milky Oats, Nettle Leaf, White Peony,* Yellow Dock

Cardiotonics: Black Cohosh,* Garlic, Ginger, Hawthorn, Linden, Motherwort, Raspberry Leaf, Reishi, Rosemary, Vervain, Yellow Dock

Circulatory stimulants : Ginger, Gingko, Hawthorn, Rosemary, Turmeric, Yarrow

Diuretics: Cleavers, Dandelion Leaf, Linden, Nettle Leaf, Yarrow

Hypertensives: Rosemary

Hypotensives: Ashwagandha, Cinnamon, Garlic, Hawthorn, Motherwort, Reishi, Yarrow

Nervines: Black Cohosh,* Cramp Bark, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Motherwort

Nutritives: Alfalfa, Burdock, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Gotu Kola, Horsetail, Marshmallow Root, Nettle Leaf, Oat Straw, Raspberry Leaf, Rose Hips, Wild Yam

Trophorestorative to the vasculature: Hawthorn

Vascular tonics : Buckwheat, Garlic, Gingko, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Rose, Linden, Yarrow

Vasodilators: Hawthorn, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, Wild Yam, Yarrow

Manifestations of anxiety in the cardiovascular system and herbal actions indicated to help

Chest pain: Analgesics, cardiotonics, diuretics, hypotensives, nervines, vasodilators

Heart palpitations: Cardiotonics, nervines

Hypertension: Adaptogens, cardiotonics, diuretics, nervines

Hypotension: Cardiotonics, circulatory stimulants, diuretics, nervines, nutritives

Respiratory system

Herbs can help to support the respiratory system when anxiety impairs its function. Decongestants, expectorants and demulcents are included below for instances when stress leads to allergy flare-ups, causing congestion or dryness in this system. Additionally, when the lungs are impacted, it can be helpful to integrate cardiotonics because of strain on the heart and circulation that can occur due to impaired breathing.

Herbs supportive to respiratory system health

Adaptogens: Astragalus, Licorice,* Reishi, Schisandra, Tulsi

Anti-inflammatories: Elderberry/Flower, Goldenrod, Hyssop, Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Mullein, Nettle Leaf, Turmeric, Yerba Mansa
Antihistamines: Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Nettle Leaf
Antimicrobials: Anise Seed, Clove, Echinacea, Garlic, Thyme, Tulsi
Antitussives: Black Cohosh,* Burdock, Ginger, Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Passionflower, Reishi, Schisandra, Thyme, Wild Cherry Bark
Bronchodilators: Anise Seed, Thyme, Usnea, Yerba Santa
Cardiotonics: Black Cohosh,* Garlic, Ginger, Hawthorn, Linden, Motherwort, Raspberry Leaf, Reishi, Rosemary, Vervain, Yellow Dock
Decongestants: Dandelion Leaf/Root, Elderberry/Flower, Nettle Leaf, Thyme, Yerba Santa
Demulcents: Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Mullein
Expectorants: Anise Seed, Elderberry/Flower, Hyssop, Licorice,* Mullein, Schisandra, Thyme, Tulsi, Wild Cherry Bark, Wild Lettuce, Yerba Santa
Immunomodulators: Astragalus, Licorice,* Reishi, Tulsi
Lung tonics: Marshmallow Root, Mullein, Shatavari, Tulsi
Nervines: California Poppy,* Tulsi, Wild Lettuce

Manifestations of anxiety in the respiratory system and herbal actions indicated to help

Sighing: Bronchodilators, lung tonics, nervines
Holding the breath: Bronchodilators, lung tonics, nervines
Shortness of breath: Bronchodilators, lung tonics, nervines
Pressure/constriction in the chest: Bronchodilators, cardiotonics, lung tonics, nervines
Allergy flare-ups or asthma attacks: Antihistamines, immunomodulators, bronchodilators

Musculoskeletal system

Herbs can help to support the musculature and skeleton when anxiety strains this system and leads to pain.

Herbs supportive to musculoskeletal system health

Adaptogens: Ashwagandha, Licorice,* Reishi, Schisandra, Shatavari, Tulsi
Analgesics: California Poppy,* Hops, Motherwort, Passionflower, Reishi, Turmeric, Willow
Anti-inflammatories: Ashwagandha, Arnica (topical), Black Cohosh,* Celery Seed, Comfrey (topical), Devil's Claw, Feverfew, Frankincense (low dose), Ginger, Horsetail, Meadowsweet, St. John's Wort, Turmeric, Wild Yam, Willow, Wintergreen, Yarrow
Antirheumatics MILD: Arnica (topical), Boneset, Dandelion Root, Motherwort, Oregon Grape Root, Rosemary, Uva Ursi, Yarrow, Yellow Dock; **MEDIUM:** Angelica, Black Cohosh,* Burdock, Celery Seed, Cramp Bark, Devil's Claw, Ginger, Meadowsweet, Mustard, Nettle Leaf, Sarsaparilla, Solomon's Seal, Wild Yam, Willow, Wintergreen; **STRONG:** Feverfew
Antispasmodics: Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Cramp Bark, Ginger, Gotu Kola, Hops, Passionflower, Skullcap, Valerian*
Circulatory stimulants: Ginger, Ginkgo, Horseradish, Mustard, Rosemary, Turmeric
Demulcents: Bladderwrack,* Licorice,* Marshmallow Rt., Mullein, Plantain, Solomon's Seal
Digestive tonics: Burdock, Chamomile, Marshmallow Root, Oregon Grape Root, Yarrow
Diuretics: Black Cohosh,* Boneset, Celery Seed, Cleavers, Dandelion Leaf, Horsetail, Nettle Leaf, Red Clover, Yarrow
Hepatics: Artichoke Leaf, Burdock, Dandelion Root, Oregon Grape Root, St. John's Wort, Vervain, Yellow Dock
Hormone regulators: Black Cohosh,* Dong Quai,* Licorice,* Red Clover, Vitex, Wild Yam
Muscle relaxant: Black Cohosh,* Hops
Nervines: Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Hops, Passionflower, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain
Nutritives: Alfalfa, Ashwagandha, Burdock, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Gotu Kola, Horsetail, Marshmallow Root, Nettle Leaf, Oatstraw, Raspberry Leaf, Tulsi, Wild Yam
Rubefacients: Cayenne, Ginger, Mustard, Peppermint, Rosemary, Wintergreen
Vasodilators : Black Cohosh,* Ginger, Rosemary, Motherwort, Yarrow

Manifestations of anxiety in the musculoskeletal system and herbal actions indicated to help

Fatigue: Adaptogens, nervines

Weakness: Adaptogens, nervines, vasodilators

Restlessness: Adaptogens, antispasmodics, nervines

Jaw clenching or grinding teeth: Analgesics, antispasmodics, nervines

Muscle tension and stiffness: Analgesics, anti-inflammatories, antirheumatics, antispasmodics, circulatory stimulants, muscle relaxants, nervines, vasodilators

Joint or nerve pain: Analgesics, anti-inflammatories, antirheumatics, circulatory stimulants, demulcents, nervines, vasodilators

Highlighted Nervines

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Eleuthero, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Linden, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Pasque Flower, Passionflower, Red Clover, Reishi, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Lettuce, Wood Betony

Ashwagandha = *Withania somnifera*

Warming & moistening / sweet / affinity to thyroid (indicated for hypothyroidism) & immune system

Adaptogen, analgesic, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antispasmodic, anxiolytic, diuretic, hormone tonic, hypotensive, immunomodulator, nervine, nervous system tonic, nutritive

Contraindications: Hyperthyroidism; avoid while taking barbiturates, as it can potentiate effects.

"May reduce nighttime elevations in stress hormones to improve sleep" [Stansbury, V. 4, 147].

"It can significantly reduce the symptoms of anxiety, and has been shown to improve cortisol levels by resetting adrenal-associated stress, reducing predisposition to anxiety" [Romm, *Herbal remedies*].

Black Cohosh = *Cimicifuga racemosa**

Cooling & drying / bitter & pungent / affinity to skin, musculoskeletal, reproductive & respiratory systems

Alterative, analgesic, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antirheumatic, antispasmodic, antitussive, astringent, cardiogenic, circulatory stimulant, diaphoretic, diuretic, hypoglycemic, hypotensive, hormone regulator, muscle relaxant, nervine, sedative, vasodilator

Caution: Lowest effective dose during lactation.

Contraindication: Pregnancy.

"Helps improve depression, and relieves dark emotional congestion" [Easley, 184]

California Poppy = *Eschscholzia californica**

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to musculoskeletal system

Analgesic, antispasmodic, hypnotic, nervine

Caution: Lowest effective dose during lactation.

Contraindications: Depression, pregnancy; avoid in conjunction with pharmaceutical sedatives & MAOIs.

"Helps to normalize nervous system function ... has an affinity for GABA receptors in the brain, calming the mind without depressing the CNS" [Easley, 201].

Catnip = *Nepeta cataria*

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to digestive system

Anodyne, antidiarrheal, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, diaphoretic, febrifuge, nervine

Contraindication: Pregnancy (except in small doses).

"A specific for irritability in babies" and thus helpful if baby's distress worsens anxiety [Stansbury, V. 4, 147].

"One of the best remedies for stress-induced IBS" & nervous stomach issues (fresh plant best) [Easley, 206].

Chamomile = *Matricaria recutita*

Warming & drying / sweet or bitter / affinity to digestive system

Analgesic, antibacterial, antiemetic, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antihistamine, antioxidant, antiseptic, antispasmodic, bitter, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive tonic, febrifuge, nervine, sedative, vulnerary

Contraindication: Potentially allergenic to people sensitive to plants in the Asteraceae family.

"A carminative with relaxing properties" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 184].

"Particularly helpful for hyperactive gut disorders such as abdominal colic & diarrhea" [Stansbury, V. 4, 146].

Cramp Bark = *Viburnum opulus*

Warming & drying / bitter / affinity to musculoskeletal & reproductive systems

Anti-inflammatory, antirheumatic, antispasmodic, astringent, hypotensive, nervine

Contraindication: Hypotension, tinnitus; avoid in conjunction with blood thinners.

"Relaxer of muscular tension and spasms" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 188].

Damiana = *Turnera diffusa*

Warming & drying / bitter & pungent / affinity to kidneys & reproductive systems

Alterative, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, aperient, astringent, carminative, diuretic, hormone regulator, nervine, nervous system tonic, sedative

Contraindication: Pregnancy.

"It has a tonic action on the CNS & the hormonal system" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 189].

Eleuthero = *Eleuthero senticosus*

Warming / sweet & bitter / affinity to adrenals, cardiovascular & immune systems

Adaptogen, antidepressant, antioxidant, circulatory stimulant, hypotensive, immunomodulator, vasodilator

Caution: Because Eleuthero stimulates the nervous system, it could potentially exacerbate anxiety in some sensitive individuals. Its energizing effect may be helpful in cases when exhaustion contributes to anxiety, but it should be balanced by a relaxing (non-sedating) nervine so that it does not worsen anxiety.

Contraindications: Hypertension; may interfere w/cardiac drugs [Hoffman, *Medical herbalism*, 544].

"An adrenal tonic for long-term stress resulting in nervous symptoms and fatigue... include in formulas for endocrine imbalances and immune insufficiency, especially when related to stress" [Stansbury, V. 3, 169].

Gotu Kola = *Centella asiatica*

Cooling & moistening / sweet & bitter / affinity to brain, skin & circulatory system

Alterative, analgesic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antirheumatic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, anxiolytic, aperient, circulatory stimulant, demulcent, diuretic, endocrine tonic, hypotensive, nervine, nervous system tonic, nootropic, nutritive, sedative, vascular tonic, vasodilator, vulnerary

Contraindication: Pregnancy; avoid in cases of hyperthyroidism [Mars, 153].

"In traditional Ayurvedic medicine, it [is] used as a calming and rejuvenating herb, indicated especially for strengthening the nerves and brain cells... also used to reduce anxiety" [Kuhn, 231].

"Has a mild adaptogenic effect by preventing increase of cortisol & adrenaline levels" [Winston, 227].

Hawthorn = *Crataegus monogyna*

Cooling & moistening / sour, sweet & bitter / affinity to cardiovascular system

Adaptogen, antibacterial, antioxidant, antispasmodic, cardiogenic, carminative, circulatory stimulant, digestive tonic, hypotensive, nervine, nutritive, trophorestorative to the vasculature, vascular tonic, vasodilator

Contraindication: May potentiate effects of certain cardiac medications, such as beta blockers [Mars, 160].

"One of the best tonic remedies for the heart & circulatory system ... either stimulating or depressing activity depending on the need ... the berries normalize function in a gentle way" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 200].

"Also an excellent nervine. In Chinese medicine, the heart stores the shen. Disturbed shen symptoms include anxiety, insomnia, bad dreams, palpitations, and irritability" [Winston, 210].

Hops = *Humulus lupulus*

Cooling & drying / bitter & pungent / affinity to digestive system

Analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, bitter, carminative, diaphoretic, diuretic, galactagogue, hypnotic, muscle relaxant, nervine

Contraindication: Depression, pregnancy; avoid in conjunction with pharmaceutical sedatives.

"Marked relaxation effect upon the CNS ... eases tension and anxiety and may be used where this tension leads to restlessness, headache and indigestion" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 200].

Hyssop = Hyssopus officinalis

Warming & drying / bitter & pungent / affinity to skin, digestive & respiratory systems

Antibacterial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, circulatory stimulant, diaphoretic, diuretic, expectorant, nervine, sedative, vasodilator

“Considered a cure-all for respiratory ailments. It helps clear thick and congested phlegm from the lungs to restore free breathing” [Easley, 250].

Lavender = Lavandula angustifolia

Cooling & drying / bitter, pungent & sweet / affinity to skin, digestive & respiratory systems

Analgesic, antibacterial, antidepressant, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antispasmodic, bitter, carminative, nervine, nervous system tonic (mild), nootropic

“Simply smelling lavender ... can suppress sympathetic nervous system activity” [Stansbury, V. 4, 169].

“It is effective for headaches, especially when they are related to stress” [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 204].

Lemon Balm = Melissa officinalis

Cooling & drying / sour / affinity to digestive & cardiovascular systems

Antibacterial, antidepressant, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antispasmodic, antiviral, carminative, diaphoretic, febrifuge, hypotensive (mild), nervine, vasodilator

Contraindication: Hypothyroidism.

“Helpful for nervousness that affects the heart and digestion” [Easley, 259].

Licorice = Glycyrrhiza glabra*

Neutral & moistening / sweet & bitter / affinity to digestive, immune, respiratory & reproductive systems

Adaptogen, adrenal tonic, alterative, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antispasmodic, antitussive, antiviral, aperient, demulcent, expectorant, hepatoprotective, hormone regulator, immunomodulator, lung tonic, nutritive (not technically a nervine but supportive to the nervous system)

Caution: Lowest effective dose during lactation.

Contraindications: Hypertension, pregnancy.

“As an adaptogen, licorice benefits HPA axis function and the sympathoadrenal system ... [indicated] for people with adrenal insufficiency who have symptoms of fatigue, tiredness upon waking up in the morning, elevated cortisol and blood sugar levels, and frequent colds” [Winston, 176].

“Include in formulas for anxiety, stress, inflammation, exhaustion & reproductive hormone imbalances ... improve[s] adrenal fatigue & stress intolerance via enhanced cortisol response” [Stansbury, V. 4, 143].

Linden = Tilia americana

Cooling & drying / sweet / affinity to cardiovascular system

Antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, cardiotoxic, diaphoretic, diuretic, hypotensive, nervine, sedative, vascular tonic

Contraindication: Hypotension.

“A delightful-smelling & tasting tea with nervine, mild antidepressant & blood-pressure-lowering effects” [Winston, 212].

Milky Oats = Avena sativa

Warming & moistening / sweet / affinity to skin, cardiovascular & digestive systems

Alterative, antidepressant, antispasmodic, aperient, aphrodisiac, blood tonic, demulcent, endocrine tonic, nervine, nervous system tonic, nootropic, nutritive, reproductive tonic, restorative, trophorestorative to the nervous system (fresh plant), vulnerary

Contraindication: People with gluten allergies should take caution [Mars, 217].

“One of the best remedies for ‘feeding’ the nervous system, especially when under stress ... a specific for nervous debility and exhaustion” [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 213].

Motherwort = Leonurus cardiaca

Cooling & drying / pungent & bitter / affinity to cardiovascular & reproductive systems

Analgesic, antibacterial, antidepressant, antifungal, antioxidant, antirheumatic, antispasmodic, anxiolytic, bitter, cardiotoxic, carminative, circulatory stimulant, hypotensive, nervine, sedative, vasodilator

Contraindication: Pregnancy [Mars, 204]; hypothyroidism, endometriosis & uterine fibroids [Verinder, 153]
“The classic herb for postpartum depression and anxiety with palpitations” [Romm, *Botanical medicine*, 425].
“An excellent tonic for the heart, strengthening without straining ... a specific for rapid heart beat ... it may be used in all heart conditions that are associated with anxiety and tension” [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 209].

Nettle Leaf = *Urtica dioica*

Cooling & drying / salty & bitter / affinity to adrenals & respiratory system

Adrenal tonic, alterative, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antirheumatic, astringent, blood tonic, circulatory stimulant, decongestant, diuretic, endocrine tonic, galactagogue, hypoglycemic, hypotensive, nutritive (not technically a nervine but supportive to the nervous system)

Caution: Because the plant is drying, be careful when giving to people with dry constitutions.

“Recommended for reduc[ing] fatigue and exhaustion, and restor[ing] adrenal potency” [Forêt, 189].

Pasque Flower = *Anemone pulsatilla*

Warming & drying / pungent & bitter / affinity to reproductive system

Analgesic, antidepressant, antirheumatic, antispasmodic, anxiolytic, nervine, sedative

Caution: FLOWER ESSENCE ONLY during lactation; otherwise, a drop-dose plant.

“Helps with shock and imagined fears of impending danger” [Easley, 290].

“For mood swings & extreme emotional sensitivity with easy tearfulness” [Stansbury, V. 4, 169].

Passionflower = *Passiflora incarnata*

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to cardiovascular & musculoskeletal systems

Analgesic, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, antitussive, anxiolytic, diaphoretic, diuretic, hypnotic, hypotensive, nervine

Contraindication: Depression [Kuhn, 334]; use cautiously in cases of hypotension [Alfs, 82]. Do not combine w/pharmaceutical sedatives, antispasmodics, anxiolytics or MAOIs as it can potentiate effects [Winston, 216]

“Of all the nervines, it has the most defined sedating effect: indicated for circular thinking that causes insomnia ... Passionflower is the off switch ... also used for stress-induced headaches” [Winston, 215].

Red Clover = *Trifolium pratense*

Cooling & balancing / sweet & salty / affinity to endocrine & cardiovascular systems

Alterative, antispasmodic, diuretic, hormone regulator, lymphatic, nervine, nutritive, phytoestrogenic

Contraindication: Use cautiously in cases of bleeding disorders [Kuhn, 368].

“Incredibly nutritious ... mineral-rich ... it is a fantastic rebuilder and detoxifier, indicated to shake up deep-set respiratory congestion, clear lymphatic congestion and chronic skin presentations” [Verinder, 185].

Reishi = *Ganoderma lucidum*

Slightly warming & balancing / bitter / affinity to skin & immune system

Adaptogen, alterative, analgesic, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antitumor, antitussive, antiviral, anxiolytic, bitter, cardiogenic, hepatoprotective, hypotensive, immunomodulator, nervine

“One of the best adaptogens for anxiety, including anxiety that prevents sleep” [Romm, *Herbal remedies*].

“In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is used to nourish the Chinese heart, which stores shen ... disturbances of shen produce anxiety, insomnia, bad dreams, moodiness, listlessness and poor memory” [Winston, 185].

Rose = *Rosa* spp.

Cooling & drying / bitter & sweet / affinity to skin & cardiovascular systems

Antibacterial, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, astringent, diuretic, nutritive (hips)

Contraindication: Avoid taking the hips in conjunction with anticoagulants and antiplatelet drugs.

“An uplifting addition to herbal teas ... rose petals reduce stress and help to heal heartache” [Easley, 295].

“The antioxidants within rosehips support the cardiovascular system and work overall to reduce systemic chronic inflammation, so they are great for venous insufficiency” [Verinder, 167].

Schisandra = *Schisandra chinensis*

Warming & drying / sweet, sour, salty, pungent & bitter / affinity to endocrine & immune systems

Adaptogen, antibacterial, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antitussive, anxiolytic, astringent, expectorant, hepatoprotective, immunomodulator, lung tonic, nervine, nervous system tonic, restorative
Contraindications: Epilepsy, pregnancy [Kuhn, 402].

"Calms shen, effective for people with stress-induced palpitations, insomnia & anxiety" [Winston, 196].

Skullcap / *Scutellaria lateriflora*

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to digestive system

Analgesic, antibacterial, antispasmodic, astringent, anxiolytic, bitter, cardiogenic, diuretic, hypotensive, nervine, nervous system tonic, restorative, sedative, trophorestorative for the nervous system, vasodilator
Note: Fresh plant for trophorestorative effect on the nervous system; dried plant for greater sedative action.

Caution: Large doses may cause confusion and giddiness [Mars, 281].

"Indicated for stressed-out people who, when nervous or agitated, develop muscle spasms, nervous tics, or tight, painful muscles ... stress-induced neck and back pain, and panic disorder" [Winston, 217].

St. John's Wort = *Hypericum perforatum**

Cooling & drying / bitter or sweet / affinity to skin, digestive & respiratory systems

Alterative, analgesic, antibacterial, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, anxiolytic, astringent, diuretic, hepatic, nervine, nervous system tonic, sedative, vulnerary

Caution: Lowest effective dose during lactation; may cause photosensitization so be mindful of sun.

Contraindication: Pregnancy; avoid in conjunction w/pharmaceutical drugs, including antidepressants.

"Effective for nerve pain and nerve damage" [Winston, 219].

"Can be used for both anxiety and depression ... increase[s] dopamine, GABA, serotonin and noradrenaline [levels] in the neural synapses, improving mood by many mechanisms simultaneously" [Stansbury, V. 4, 91].

Tulsi = *Ocimum tenuiflorum*

Cooling & drying / pungent & bitter / affinity to brain, digestive, endocrine, immune & respiratory systems

Adaptogen, antibacterial, antidepressant, antioxidant, antiviral, carminative, diuretic, expectorant, galactagogue, hypotensive, immunomodulator, lung tonic, nervine, nutritive

"It reduces feelings of stress and excessive immune responses in conditions like hay fever and asthma ... [simultaneously, it also] enhances digestion, cerebral circulation, memory and concentration" [Easley, 246].

Valerian = *Valeriana officinalis**

Warming & drying / pungent, bitter & slightly sweet / affinity to digestive system

Analgesic, antibacterial, antispasmodic, astringent, bitter, carminative, diaphoretic, diuretic, hypnotic, hypotensive, nervine, nervous system tonic, restorative, sedative

Caution: Lowest effective dose during lactation; can be stimulating to people who run hot.

Contraindication: Hypotension, hypoglycemia; avoid in conjunction with pharmaceutical sedatives.

"A potent nervine with tranquilizing effects on the CNS, [indicated for] insomnia & mild pain" [Easley, 317].

"One of the most useful relaxing nervines ... used to reduce tension & anxiety, overexcitability and stress ... as a pain reliever it is most indicated where pain is associated with tension" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 232].

Vervain = *Verbena* spp.

Cold & drying / pungent & bitter / affinity to digestive & respiratory systems

Alterative, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, astringent, anxiolytic, bitter, cardiogenic, diaphoretic, diuretic, galactagogue, hepatic, hypotensive, nervine, nervous system tonic, sedative, vulnerary

Contraindication: Kidney disease, pregnancy.

"Used to relax nerves & combat anxiety; helpful for nervous exhaustion from long-term stress" [Easley, 192].

Wild Lettuce = *Lactuca canadensis*

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to reproductive & respiratory systems

Analgesic, antispasmodic, antitussive, diuretic, expectorant, galactagogue, hypnotic, hypoglycemic, nervine

Contraindication: Potentially allergenic to people sensitive to plants in the Asteraceae family.

"A valuable remedy for insomnia, restlessness and excitability and other manifestations of an overactive nervous system. As an antispasmodic it can be used for dry irritated coughs, colic pains in the guts and uterus, and so may be used in painful periods" [Hoffman, *Holistic herbal*, 235].

Wood Betony = *Stachys hyssopifolia*

Cooling & drying / bitter / affinity to digestive & respiratory systems

Alterative, analgesic, antispasmodic, bitter, carminative, circulatory stimulant, hypoglycemic, hypotensive, nervine, sedative, vulnerary

"An analgesic nervine that relaxes muscle tension; [indicated] to relieve back & facial pain" [Easley, 324].

Nervine Energetics Chart

Herb	Warming	Cooling	Drying	Moisten.	Bitter	Pungent	Salty	Sour	Sweet
Ashwagandha	🌿			🌿					🌿
Black Cohosh		🌿	🌿		🌿	🌿			
California Poppy		🌿	🌿		🌿				
Catnip		🌿	🌿		🌿				
Chamomile	🌿			🌿	🌿				🌿
Cramp Bark	🌿		🌿		🌿				
Damiana	🌿		🌿		🌿	🌿			
Eleuthero	🌿				🌿				🌿
Gotu Kola		🌿		🌿	🌿				🌿
Hawthorn		🌿		🌿	🌿			🌿	🌿
Hops		🌿	🌿		🌿	🌿			
Hyssop	🌿		🌿		🌿	🌿			
Lavender		🌿	🌿		🌿	🌿			🌿
Lemon Balm		🌿	🌿					🌿	
Licorice				🌿	🌿				🌿
Linden	🌿		🌿			🌿			🌿
Milky Oats	🌿			🌿					🌿
Motherwort		🌿	🌿		🌿	🌿			🌿
Nettle Leaf		🌿	🌿		🌿		🌿		
Pasque Flower	🌿		🌿		🌿	🌿			
Passionflower		🌿	🌿		🌿				
Red Clover		🌿					🌿		🌿
Reishi	🌿				🌿				
Rose	🌿		🌿		🌿				🌿
Schisandra	🌿		🌿		🌿	🌿	🌿	🌿	🌿
Skullcap		🌿	🌿		🌿				
St. John's Wort		🌿	🌿		🌿				🌿
Tulsi		🌿	🌿		🌿	🌿			
Valerian	🌿		🌿		🌿	🌿			🌿
Vervain		🌿	🌿						
Wild Lettuce		🌿	🌿		🌿				
Wood Betony		🌿	🌿		🌿				

Warming herbs are generally supportive for the overall body in the first 6 weeks following birth; however, cooling nervines are also appropriate if the nervous system is hyperactive, and these can be complemented with warming herbs that target other body systems (such as digestion & circulation) for a balanced formula.

Herbal Actions Glossary

Herbal actions indicated for anxiety

Adaptogen

Increases resistance and resilience to stress

Ashwagandha, Astragalus, Eleuthero, Gogi Berry, Licorice,* Reishi, Schisandra, Shatavari, Tulsi

Adrenal tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the adrenals

Astragalus, Licorice,* Nettle Leaf

Antidepressant

Alleviates or reduces depression

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* Damiana, Eleuthero, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Milk Thistle, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Rose, Rosemary, Schisandra, St. John's Wort, Tulsi, Vervain

Anxiolytic

Alleviates or reduces anxiety

Ashwagandha, Gotu Kola, Motherwort, Passionflower, Pasque Flower, Reishi, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, Valerian,* Vervain

Endocrine tonic

Strengthens and nourishes the endocrine system

Gotu Kola, Nettle Leaf, Milky Oats

Febrifuge

Reduces or relieves fevers

Catnip, Chamomile, Elder Flower, Ginger, Lemon Balm, Willow, Yarrow

Hormone regulator

Promotes the normalization of hormone production

Black Cohosh,* Damiana, Dong Quai,* Licorice,* Red Clover, Vitex, White Peony,* Wild Yam

Hormone tonic

Supports the organs that produce hormones

Ashwagandha, Raspberry Leaf

Hypnotic

Induces deep nerve relaxation and a promotes a healing sleep state

California Poppy,* Hops, Passionflower, Valerian,* Wild Lettuce

Muscle relaxant

Relaxes the muscles

Black Cohosh,* Hops, White Peony*

Nervine

Eases anxiety and tension by soothing both the body and mind

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hyssop, Hops, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Milky Oats, Motherwort, Pasque

Flower, Passionflower, Red Clover, Reishi, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Lettuce, Wood Betony

Nervous system tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the nerves

Ashwagandha, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Lavender, Milky Oats, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Valerian,* Vervain

Nootropic

Enhances cognitive function

Gotu Kola, Lavender, Milky Oats, Rosemary

Postpartum tonic

Helps to regain strength after giving birth

Dong Quai,* Raspberry Leaf

Sedative

Calms or slightly tranquilizes the nervous system

Black Cohosh,* Chamomile, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hyssop, Linden, Motherwort, Pasque Flower, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Vervain, Wood Betony

Restorative

Helps to rebuild a depleted condition and normalize body functions

Elderberry, Fenugreek, Milky Oats, Schisandra, Skullcap, Valerian,* Wild Yam

Trophorestorative to the nervous system

Repairs damaged nervous system tissues

Milky Oats, Skullcap, St. John's Wort*

Uterine tonic

Strengthens and nourishes the uterus

Motherwort, Nettles, Raspberry Leaf

Herbal actions indicated for physical manifestations of anxiety

Alterative

Opens channels of elimination, improving bodily function and thus enhancing vitality

Black Cohosh,* Burdock, Damiana, Dandelion, Dong Quai,* Echinacea, Elderberry/Flower, Gotu Kola, Licorice,* Milky Oats, Nettle, Raspberry Leaf, Red Clover, Reishi, St. John's Wort,* Vervain, Wood Betony, Yellow Dock

Analgesic

Soothes or reduces pain

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Chamomile, Cinnamon, Dong Quai,* Ginger, Gotu Kola, Hops, Lavender, Motherwort, Passionflower, Reishi, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Turmeric, Valerian,* Wild Lettuce, Willow, Wood Betony, Yarrow

Antacid

Neutralizes an overly acidic environment

Dandelion Leaf, Marshmallow Root, Meadowsweet, Raspberry Leaf

Antibacterial

Inhibits growth of pathogenic bacteria

Black Walnut, Calendula, Garlic, Gotu Kola, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, Oregon Grape Root, Passionflower, Red Clover, Reishi, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Thyme, Tulsi, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Valerian,* Willow, Yerba Mansa

Antiemetic

Reduces frequency and severity of nausea and vomiting

Chamomile, Fennel, Ginger, Peppermint, Raspberry Leaf

Antifungal

Inhibits growth of pathogenic fungi

Barberry, Black Walnut, Calendula, Cardamom, Chamomile, Clove, Garlic, Lavender, Motherwort, Oregano, Oregon Grape Root, Passionflower, Spilanthes, Usnea, Yarrow

Antihistamine

Blocks histamine action to relieve allergy symptoms

Chamomile, Licorice,* Lemon Balm, Nettle Leaf

Anti-inflammatory

Reduces or regulates excess inflammation

Arnica (topical), Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* Burdock, Calendula, Celery Seed, Chamomile, Comfrey (topical), Cramp Bark, Damiana, Devil's Claw, Dong Quai,* Echinacea, Elderberry/Flower, Feverfew, Frankincense, Ginger, Goldenrod, Gotu Kola, Hops, Horsetail, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Linden, Marshmallow Root, Meadowsweet, Mullein, Nettle Leaf, Passionflower, Peppermint, Plantain, Raspberry Leaf, Red Clover, Reishi, Rose, Schisandra, St. John's Wort,* Turmeric, Vervain, Wild Yam, Willow, Wintergreen, Yarrow, Yellow Dock, Yerba Mansa

Antimicrobial

Inhibits the activity of pathogenic microbes

Anise Seed, Clove, Echinacea, Garlic, Thyme, Turmeric

Antioxidant

Prevents free radical or oxidative damage

Ashwagandha, Chamomile, Dandelion Leaf, Elderberry, Eleuthero, Ginger, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Milk Thistle, Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Peppermint, Reishi, Rose, Rosemary, Schisandra, St. John's Wort,* Shepherd's Purse, Tulsi, Turmeric

Antirheumatic

Prevents and relieves mild rheumatism (inflammation and pain in joints and muscles)

MILD: Arnica (topical), Boneset, Dandelion Root, Motherwort, Oregon Grape Root, Rosemary, Uva Ursi, Yarrow, Yellow Dock; MEDIUM: Angelica, Black Cohosh,* Burdock, Celery Seed, Cramp Bark, Devil's Claw, Ginger, Meadowsweet, Mustard, Nettle Leaf, Sarsaparilla, Solomon's Seal, Wild Yam, Willow, Wintergreen; STRONG: Feverfew

Antiseptic

Prevents the growth of pathogenic microbes

Damiana, Echinacea, Gotu Kola, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Oregon Grape Root, Rosemary, St. John's Wort,* Thyme, Turmeric, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Willow, Yarrow, Yerba Mansa, Yerba Santa

Antispasmodic

Relieves smooth muscle spasms

Anise Seed, Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Dill Seed, Dong Quai,* Elderberry/Flower, Fennel, Ginger, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Licorice,* Linden, Motherwort, Oregano, Passionflower, Peppermint, Raspberry Leaf, Red Clover, Rosemary, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Thyme, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Cherry Bark, Wild Lettuce, Wild Yam, Wood Betony, Yarrow, Yerba Santa

Antitussive

Reduces coughing

Black Cohosh, * Burdock, Ginger, Licorice, * Marshmallow Root, Passionflower, Reishi, Schisandra, Thyme, Wild Cherry Bark, Wild Lettuce

Antiviral

Inhibits the growth of viruses

Calendula, Echinacea, Elderberry, Ginger, Hyssop, Lemon Balm, Licorice, * Mullein, Reishi, St. John's Wort, * Tulsi, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Yarrow

Aperient

Mild laxative

Burdock, Damiana, Dandelion Root, Dong Quai, * Elderberry, Fennel, Ginger, Gotu Kola, Licorice, * Yellow Dock

Appetite stimulant

Stimulates the appetite when absent

Gotu Kola (mild), Milk Thistle, Orange Peel

Astringent

Tones tissues

Black Cohosh, * Catnip, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Hops, Hyssop, Meadowsweet, Nettle Leaf, Plantain, Raspberry Leaf, Rose, Schisandra, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, * Thyme, Valerian, * Vervain, Yarrow

Bitter

Aids digestive process by stimulating digestion through bitter flavor

Artichoke Leaf, Blessed Thistle, Chamomile, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Hops, Lavender, Milk Thistle, Motherwort, Orange Peel, Oregon Grape Root, Reishi, Rosemary, Skullcap, Turmeric, Valerian, * Vervain, Wood Betony, Yarrow, Yellow Dock

Blood tonic

Nourishes the blood

Astragalus, Dong Quai, * Milky Oats, Nettle Leaf, White Peony, * Yellow Dock

Bronchodilator

Relaxes bronchial muscle to open air passages to lungs

Anise Seed, Thyme, Usnea, Yerba Santa

Cardiotonic

Strengthens and nourishes the heart

Black Cohosh, * Garlic, Ginger, Hawthorn, Linden, Motherwort, Raspberry Leaf, Reishi, Rosemary, Skullcap, Vervain, Yellow Dock

Carminative

Stimulates digestive system to boost function, dispels gas and reduces bloating

Catnip, Chamomile, Cinnamon, Coriander, Cumin, Damiana, Dill Seed, Fennel, Fenugreek, Ginger, Hops, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, Peppermint, Rosemary, Thyme, Tulsi, Turmeric, Valerian, * Wood Betony, Yarrow

Circulatory stimulant

Stimulates circulation throughout the body

Black Cohosh, * Dong Quai, * Eleuthero, Ginger, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Horseradish, Hyssop, Motherwort, Mustard, Nettle Leaf, Rosemary, Turmeric, Wood Betony, Yarrow

Decongestant

Reduces nasal mucus production

Dandelion Leaf/Root, Elderberry/Flower, Nettle Leaf, Oregano, Thyme, Yerba Santa

Demulcent

Due to its mucilage, soothes and protects irritated or inflamed tissue

Gotu Kola, Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Milk Thistle, Mullein, Plantain, Solomon's Seal

Diaphoretic

Promotes perspiration, allowing elimination through the skin

Black Cohosh,* Catnip, Hops, Hyssop, Lemon Balm, Linden, Passionflower, Peppermint, Valerian,* Vervain, Yarrow

Digestive tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the digestive system

Burdock, Chamomile, Hawthorn Berries, Marshmallow Root, Oregon Grape Root, Yarrow

Diuretic

Increases elimination through urine

Ashwagandha, Black Cohosh,* Boneset, Celery Seed, Cleavers, Damiana, Dandelion Leaf, Gotu Kola, Hops, Horsetail, Hyssop, Linden, Nettle Leaf, Passionflower, Red Clover, Rose, Skullcap, St. John's Wort,* Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wild Lettuce, Yarrow

Expectorant

Soothes bronchial spasms and loosens mucus, helping dry coughs

Anise Seed, Elderberry/Flower, Hyssop, Licorice,* Mullein, Schisandra, Thyme, Tulsi, Wild Cherry Bark, Wild Lettuce, Yerba Santa

Galactagogue

Increases milk supply

Blessed Thistle, Burdock, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Elder Flower, Fennel, Fenugreek, Hops, Marshmallow Root, Milk Thistle, Nettle Leaf, Shatavari, Tulsi, Vervain, Vitex, Wild Lettuce

Hepatic

Nourishes and strengthens the liver

Artichoke Leaf, Burdock, Dandelion Root, Milk Thistle, Oregon Grape Root, St. John's Wort,* Vervain, Yellow Dock

Hepatoprotective

Protects the liver

Dong Quai,* Ginger, Licorice,* Milk Thistle, Reishi, Schisandra, Turmeric

Hypertensive

Raises low blood pressure

Rosemary

Hypoglycemic

Lowers elevated blood sugar

Black Cohosh,* Cinnamon, Garlic, Nettle Leaf, Turmeric, Wild Lettuce, Wood Betony

Hypotensive

Lowers high blood pressure

Ashwagandha, Cinnamon, Cramp Bark, Eleuthero, Garlic, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Lemon Balm, Linden, Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Passionflower, Reishi, Skullcap, Tulsi, Valerian,* Vervain, Wood Betony, Yarrow

Immunomodulator

Strengthens the immune system, building resistance over time

Ashwagandha, Astragalus, Eleuthero, Licorice, * Reishi, Schisandra, Tulsi

Immunostimulant

Stimulates acute immune system function

Boneset, Calendula, Cat's Claw, Dong Quai*, Echinacea, Elderberry, Garlic, Gogi Berry, Spilanthes, Usnea, Yerba Mansa

Liver tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the liver

Oregon Grape Root, Raspberry Leaf, Rosemary

Lung tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the lungs

Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Mullein, Schisandra, Shatavari, Tulsi

Lymphatic

Enhances lymphatic flow and drainage

Calendula, Cleavers, Echinacea, Figwort, Red Clover, Red Root, Violet Leaf

Nutritive

Supplies nutrients in support of overall body function

Alfalfa, Ashwagandha, Burdock, Dandelion Leaf/Root, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Horsetail, Licorice,* Marshmallow Root, Nettle Leaf, Oat Straw, Raspberry Leaf, Red Clover, Rose Hips, Tulsi, Wild Yam

Phytoestrogenic

Contains the raw material the body needs to produce estrogen

Raspberry Leaf, Red Clover

Rubefacient

Generates a localized increase in blood flow when applied topically, which helps to nourish, cleanse and heal the area

Cayenne, Ginger, Mustard, Peppermint, Rosemary, Wintergreen

Trophorestorative to the vasculature

Repairs damaged vascular tissues

Hawthorn

Uterine tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the uterus

Motherwort, Nettle Leaf, Raspberry Leaf

Vascular tonic

Nourishes and strengthens the vasculature

Buckwheat, Garlic, Gingko, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Rose, Linden, Yarrow

Vasodilator

Dilates the blood vessels

Black Cohosh,* Eleuthero, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hyssop, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, Rosemary, Skullcap, Wild Yam, Yarrow

Vulnerary

Promotes wound healing

Calendula, Chamomile, Gotu Kola, Linden, St. John's Wort,* Vervain, Wood Betony, Yarrow

Herbal Preparations

“Milky oats, chamomile, lavender and lemon balm are all pleasant tasting, gentle nervines with a long history of use for the nursing mother to promote relaxation, ensure ample breast milk, and as a treatment both through the mother and directly to the baby for a fussy or colicky baby” [Romm, Botanical medicine, 425].

An herbal intervention can be as simple as a cup of Chamomile tea. During the postpartum period, sometimes that's all that's possible. To make it a medicinal cup of tea, increase the ratio to 1 tablespoon of herb for each cup of water, steep covered, and steep for at least 30 minutes (ideally) [Kaufer].

Teas

Sleep milk (or tea)
Mother's milk tea to encourage milk supply
Seed decoction to enhance milk supply & calm digestion
Burdock & Reishi decoction for gentle liver support
Chamomile cold infusion for GI inflammation
Hawthorn infusion for heart support
Tulsi infusion for relieving stress & tension
Schisandra decoction for energizing support
Nutritive infusion for overall mineralization support
Reishi hot cocoa for adaptogenic & mood support
Ashwagandha golden milk for achy joints

Tinctures

Anxiety (base)
Anxiety with chronic stress
Anxiety with hypersensitivity & irritability
Anxiety with mind chatter and/or physical tension
Anxiety with chest tightness and/or heart palpitations
Anxiety with digestive upset (gas, bloating, stomach cramps)
Anxiety with stress over a low milk supply
Anxiety with panic attacks
Insomnia with exhaustion
PPD with anxiety

Herbal baths

Lavender bath
Calendula parent/baby bath
Relaxing flowers foot bath
Soothing steam inhalation

Massage oils

Lavender massage
Infused oil massage with scent of choice

Flower essences

Pasque Flower
Dr. Bach's Rescue Remedy

Teas

Teas are a simple, time-honored way to take herbs. The act itself of making tea - or receiving tea made by a loved one - can help to calm the spirit and ground the body through the sensory experience of breathing in aromatic steam, holding a warm cup and enjoying the flavors.

Sleep milk (or tea) [Ou, 216]

Gently bring milk to a low boil, then turn off heat and add the herbs, cover and steep for at least 10 minutes (or 30 minutes to also relieve an upset stomach). Alternatively, to make a tea instead of an infused milk, add 2 tablespoons of lemon balm to the blend and allow to steep for 10-30 minutes.

- Milk of choice** - 2 cups
- Chamomile** - 2 tablespoons
- Lemon Balm** - 2 tablespoons (for tea version)
- Lavender** - 1 tablespoon

Mother's milk tea to encourage milk supply [Romm, Botanical medicine, 426]

Pour 1 cup of just boiled water over 1 tablespoon of the herbal blend. Cover and steep for 10-15 minutes (30 minutes to help with stomach upset), then strain and enjoy! Drink 1-4 cups per day. For batch preparation, pour 1 quart of just boiled water over a heaping ¼ cup of the herbal blend, and sip throughout the day, either at room temperature or gently reheated. Stronger nervines could be added for anxiety, such as Hops, or an adaptogen, such as Shatavari (both are galactagogues).

- Catnip** - 1 tablespoon
- Chamomile** - 1 tablespoon
- Fennel Seed** - 1 teaspoon
- Lavender** - ¼ teaspoon

Seed decoction to enhance milk supply & calm digestion [Ou, 214]

Simmer seeds (covered) in 1 quart of water for 15-30 minutes, then steep for 1-4 hours & strain. Gently reheat if desired. Optionally, sweeten by adding Licorice (to taste) to the simmering seeds. For added nerve support, add hops at the very end, after turning off the heat.

- Cumin Seed** - 1-2 tablespoons
- Fennel Seed** - 1-2 tablespoons
- Fenugreek Seed** - 1-2 tablespoons
- Licorice Root** - 1 tablespoon (optional)
- Hops** - 1 teaspoon - 1 tablespoon (optional)

Burdock & Reishi decoction for gentle liver support [Forêt, 292]

Simmer herbs in 6 cups of water (covered) for 45 minutes, then steep for 15-30 minutes & strain. The liver support provided here can help to enhance both absorption and elimination of nutrients. Reishi and Licorice are included here as hepatoprotectives and for adaptogenic support. In addition, the sweetness of Licorice helps to balance the bitterness of Reishi. This makes for 2 days.

- Burdock** - 2 tablespoons
- Cinnamon Bark** - 2 teaspoons
- Cardamom Pods** - 5 pods (adjust to taste)
- Licorice Root** - 1 tablespoon (adjust to taste)
- Reishi** - 1-2 dried slices (adjust to taste)

Chamomile cold infusion for GI inflammation [Romm, Botanical medicine, 58]

Pour 1 quart of cold water over the herbal blend in a large jar. Cover & steep overnight; strain the next morning and sip throughout the day. Indicated for heartburn, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) & upset stomach. Fennel Seed can be added to help reduce gas and/or bloating.

- Chamomile** - 2 tablespoons
- Marshmallow Root** - 2 tablespoons
- Ginger Root or powder** - 1 teaspoon (adjust to taste)
- Fennel Seed** - 1 tablespoon (optional)

Hawthorn infusion for heart support [Gladstar, Medicinal herbs, 146]

Pour 1 quart of just boiled water over the herbal blend in a large jar. Cover and steep 15-30 minutes; then strain and sip throughout the day. For a refreshing option in hot weather, this could also be prepared as a cold, overnight infusion, which would bring out the demulcent action of Linden. St. John's Wort could also be included for additional anxiolytic support.

Hawthorn Leaves/Flowers - 2 tablespoons
Lemon Balm - 2 tablespoons
Linden - 1 tablespoon
St. John's Wort - 1 tablespoon (optional)

Tulsi infusion for relieving stress & tension [Verinder, 57]

Pour 1 quart of just boiled water over the herbal blend in a jar. Cover & steep 15-30 minutes; strain and sip throughout the day. This could also be prepared as a refreshing cold, overnight infusion.

Tulsi - 3 tablespoons
Passionflower - 2 tablespoons
Lavender - 1 teaspoon

Schisandra decoction for energizing support [Winston, 267]

Simmer herbs in 6 cups of water (covered) for 15-30 minutes; steep 15 minutes. Strain and enjoy! Refrigerate remaining tea and gently reheat or bring to room temperature the next day.

Schisandra is another adaptogen with calming energy for a non-frenetic boost.

Schisandra - 1 tablespoon
Licorice - 1 teaspoon (adjust to taste)
Ginger (fresh) - 3-inch piece

Nutritive infusion for overall mineralization support [Gladstar, *Herbal healing for women*, 180]

Pour 1 quart of just boiled water over the herbal blend in a large jar. Cover & steep overnight; strain the next morning and sip throughout the day. Prepare a double batch and refrigerate the remainder. Gotu Kola is both an anxiolytic & nutritive. Other herbs can be added based on individual need, such as Raspberry Leaf as a uterine tonic, Rosemary for mental clarity, Chamomile to settle the stomach.

Alfalfa - 1 tablespoon
Horsetail - 1 tablespoon
Nettle Leaf - 2 tablespoons
Oat Straw - 2 tablespoons
Gotu Kola - 2 tablespoons

Reishi hot cocoa for adaptogenic & mood support [Romm, *Reishi*]

Whisk milk and Cacao powder in a saucepan. Add Reishi & Cinnamon, slowly warm, then simmer for 45 minutes; steep for 15 minutes more, then remove Reishi & Cinnamon, add Vanilla, stir, enjoy! For a faster preparation, warm milk with Cacao & Cinnamon powder, remove from heat, add Vanilla & 1-2 dropperfuls of Reishi tincture. (Avoid drinking past noon to not interfere with sleep at night.)

Cacao is included to support mood, energy & cognitive function [Forêt, 261].

Milk of choice - 2 cups
Cacao powder - 1 tablespoon
Cinnamon stick (or 1 teaspoon powder)
Reishi - 1 dried slice
Vanilla - 1 teaspoon

Ashwagandha golden milk for achy joints [Mountain Rose]

Whisk Ashwagandha & spices into milk of choice, then warm in a saucepan and simmer (covered) for 10-15 minutes to increase solubility of curcumin & to enhance medicinal action of Ashwagandha. This can also be prepared as a tea by simmering the herbs (covered) in water for 10-15 minutes.

Turmeric is included here as a potent anti-inflammatory herb with an affinity to the musculoskeletal system, as well as the digestive system. The spices are all carminatives, providing additional comfort to the digestive system. Ashwagandha offers adaptogenic support that can help to deepen sleep.

Milk of choice - 1 cup
Turmeric - 2 teaspoons
Ashwagandha - 1 teaspoon
Cinnamon, Ginger & Fennel powders - ½ teaspoon each
Cardamom powder & Black Pepper (ground) - ¼ teaspoon each

Tinctures

Tinctures are a quick, convenient way to take herbs because they do not require preparation time, equipment or herbs on hand. They can be kept beside the bed and taken in the middle of the night, or carried around in a pocket for mobile support. The convenience is especially helpful if one is already feeling overwhelmed.

Anxiety (base) [Winston, 214]

This is a base formula that could be taken alone or with other herbs for other issues (see below). Unless the person runs hot, a warming herb (such as a carminative) could be added to counteract the cold energetics in Motherwort and especially Vervain. Possibilities include Cardamom or Fennel. See *Nervine Energetics Chart* for other warming herbs.

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

Motherwort - 2 parts

Vervain - 1 part

Anxiety with chronic stress

Fresh Milky Oats are included here because they are indicated to restore frayed nerves.

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

Milky Oats (fresh) - 3 parts

Motherwort - 2 parts

Vervain - 1 part

Anxiety with hypersensitivity & irritability

Fresh Skullcap is included because it is indicated for irritability & to restore the nerves.

As aforementioned, potentially add a warming herb for energetic balance (depending on person).

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

Skullcap (fresh) - 3 parts

Motherwort - 2 parts

Vervain - 1 part

Anxiety with mind chatter and/or physical tension

Passionflower is included because it is indicated for both mind chatter & physical tension.

As aforementioned, potentially add a warming herb for energetic balance (depending on person).

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

Passionflower - 3 parts

Motherwort - 2 parts

Vervain - 1 part

Anxiety with chest tightness and/or heart palpitations

Cardiotonics - Hawthorn, Linden, Motherwort & Reishi - are included here to tonify the heart.

Additionally, Reishi contributes adaptogenic, mood-stabilizing support and is a mild analgesic.

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

Reishi - 3 parts

Hawthorn Berries - 3 parts

Motherwort - 2 parts

Vervain - 1 part

Linden - 1 part

Anxiety with digestive upset (gas, bloating, stomach cramps)

Chamomile is included because it is both a nervine and a digestive tonic, and thus it helps to calm a nervous stomach. Fennel Seed is a specific herb for gas and bloating. Ginger warms the digestive system and helps to stimulate circulation, so it can help when digestion freezes under stress.

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily and more as needed

Chamomile - 3 parts

Fennel Seed - 3 parts

Ginger - 1 part

Anxiety with stress over a low milk supply

Galactagogues are included to encourage milk production (contraindicated with an oversupply).

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

- Shatavari** - 3 parts
- Chamomile** - 2 parts
- Fennel** - 2 parts
- Vervain** - 1 part
- Hops** - 1 part

Anxiety with panic attacks

In addition, Pasque Flower essence could be added to the blend.

Dose - 1-4 ml taken as needed, up to 5 doses of 4 ml per day.

- Chamomile** - 1 part
- Lemon Balm** - 1 part
- Passionflower** - 1 part
- California Poppy** - ½ part
- Lavender** - ½ part

Insomnia with exhaustion [Romm, *Natural health after birth*, 176]

Dose - 5 ml taken 2-3 times daily, plus 2.5 ml every 30 minutes for 2 hours before bed

- Passionflower** - 3 parts
- Chamomile** - 2 parts
- Skullcap** - 2 parts
- Linden** - 2 parts
- Lavender** - 1 part

PPD with anxiety [Romm, *Natural health after birth*, 175]

Dose - 5 ml taken 3 times daily

- Ashwagandha** - 6 parts
- St. John's Wort** - 5 parts
- Vervain** - 4 parts
- Licorice** - 3 parts
- Eleuthero** - 2 parts

Herbal baths

Baths offer a warm, soothing way to relax. Bath time can be a solitary break or a time to bond if parent and baby bathe together. If time is short, a foot bath can help with relaxation and deliver herbs topically. Another option is a steam inhalation as a way to pause and focus on breath. All bathing done before bed - including steam inhalations - can help to improve sleep quality at night. Herbs can be chosen based simply on enjoying their scents. This is pleasure medicine. Epsom salts can be included in baths to enhance relaxation.

Lavender bath

Fill the bath to desired depth and add 1-2 drops of Lavender essential oil (or tea from ¼ Lavender).

Note! If the baby joins the bath, do NOT use essential oils. For a parent/baby bath, see below...

- Lavender essential oil - 1-2 drops
- Or Lavender tea made from ¼ cup lavender flowers

Calendula parent/baby bath

Ask for help with this if taking a bath with one's baby because it may require helping hands! Steep the tea and add to the bath and stir, checking for a baby-safe water temperature before getting in. Here, Calendula is included to nurture the skin, with Chamomile and Lavender to calm the nerves. Additionally, any gentle herbs could be included, especially if the baby seems to enjoy the scent.

- Calendula** - ¼ cup
- Chamomile** - ¼ cup
- Lavender** - 1 tablespoon

Relaxing flowers foot bath [Verinder, 92]

Fill a saucepan with water and add herbal blend. Gently warm (covered) and simmer for 5 minutes. Strain herbs - or keep them in the water if they bring joy - and add this "tea" to a basin big enough for one's feet. Add enough cool water to create a comfortable temperature, then immerse feet, ideally ankle-deep. Stay here for as long as desired or able, and breathe. With assistance, one could potentially take a foot bath while nursing their baby.

Lemon Balm - 2 tablespoons

Rose petals - 2 tablespoons

Lavender - 1 tablespoon

Soothing steam inhalation [Verinder, 93]

Warm water in a saucepan and once it boils, turn off the heat, add herbs, stir and cover until ready to steam. Carefully move the pot to a table where one can sit in front of it. Find a comfortable position and have a towel ready to drape over one's head. Lift the lid off the pot and first test the temperature with fingers in order to avoid burning one's face. When ready, cover one's head with a towel draped over the pot to create a steam dome, and inhale deeply through the nose for up to 5 minutes.

Helichrysum (or any other aromatic herb) - ¼ cup

Massage oils

Massage can be very relaxing for individuals who find comfort in touch. The physical pleasure of massage can provide a healthy distraction from anxiety and reset the nervous system. If the massage is given by a trusted loved one, the experience can also create a sense of connection that can be healing. Alternatively, the massage can be given by a professional so that the recipient can totally relax, without any pressure to socialize. In addition to the relaxation massage offers, it can also be therapeutic for any physical tension or pain that may accompany anxiety. Massage oils scented with herbs can enhance the experience with aromatherapy. Any scent that the person finds relaxing, comforting or enjoyable can be supportive. Note that if the breasts are massaged, massage oil should be washed off (especially the nipples) before nursing.

Lavender massage

Add 1-2 drops of Lavender essential oil into 1 tablespoon of a carrier oil such as olive, almond or jojoba oil [Ody, 64]. For an enhanced relaxation effect, the carrier oil can be slightly warmed before adding the essential oil. Then massage with the oil on hands, either as a self-massage or given by someone else. Remember to wash any oil off of breasts (especially nipples) before nursing.

Infused oil massage with scent of choice

Massage oil can also be infused with any aromatic plant of choice. This opens up the possibilities to many different herbs (as the only essential oil encouraged in this paper is Lavender). Any scent that brings pleasure can be helpful in reducing anxiety. Additionally, any herb that a person has a positive relationship with may be helpful since familiarity can bring comfort. Possibilities include Lavender, Chamomile, Ginger, Lemon Balm, Orange Blossom, Rose, or Rosemary. To be on the safe side, only use plants that can be ingested, and wash any oil off of breasts (especially nipples) before nursing.

To make herbal-infused oil at home, fill a glass jar ¾ full with dried herb(s) of choice. Then pour a carrier oil - such as olive, almond or jojoba oil - to an inch below the top of the jar. Cover the jar with a lid and create a label noting the carrier oil, herb(s) and date. Place the jar inside a paper bag to obstruct light and then put it in a sunny spot for warmth, such as a window sill. Every day for a month, gently shake the jar to move the oil around the herbs. After a month's time, strain the herbs using a tea strainer. Label the oil and use liberally for massage.

Flower essences

Flower essences contain the unique vibrational imprint of a flower, infused in water. As "energy medicine" they are intended to "affect a person's emotional state rather than their physical symptoms" [Easley, 132]. It is believed that flower essences work by transmitting a positive energetic influence, including the ability to survive amidst challenges. Flower essences offer gentle and safe support for people of any age.

Pasque Flower

Pasque flower essence is believed to help with panic attacks.

Dose - 3 drops under the tongue, up to 3 times daily [Verinder, 103].

Dr. Bach's Rescue Remedy

Formulated by Dr. Edward Bach, the creator of flower essences, Rescue Remedy contains 5 flowers: Cherry Plum, Clematis, Impatiens, Rock Rose and Star of Bethlehem. This formula was intended to promote "a sense of calm and emotional balance, especially in times of difficulty" [Bach Remedies].

Dose - 4 drops taken directly on the tongue, repeated as needed.

Additional Recommendations

Lifestyle

The following list of tips is borrowed verbatim from the article *Postpartum anxiety is invisible, but common and treatable* by Stephanie Collier, MD & MPH, instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School [Collier].

- Cuddle your baby (a lot). This releases oxytocin, which can lower anxiety levels.
- Try to maximize sleep ... Sleeping in separate rooms or taking shifts caring for the baby may be necessary during the first few months. Aim for at least one uninterrupted four-hour stretch of sleep, and be mindful about caffeine intake.
- Spend time with other mothers. Although you may feel like you don't have the time, connecting with other mothers (even online) can do wonders in lowering your fears and validating your emotions. Chances are you are not the only one worrying up a storm.
- Increase your physical activity. In spite of the physical toll that pregnancy, delivery, and milk production take on your body, physical activity is one of the most powerful anti-anxiety strategies. Activities that incorporate breathing exercises, such as yoga, may be particularly helpful.
- Wean gradually. If you are breastfeeding and make the decision to wean, try to do so gently (when possible) to minimize sudden hormonal changes.
- Ask for help. Caring for a baby often requires a village. There is an old saying "sleep when the baby sleeps." You may prefer "do laundry when the baby does laundry."

Nutrition

In general, the postpartum body and mind benefit from warm and soft (easy-to-digest) foods. Warmth and ease are also supportive to the nervous system because these sensations help the body to feel safe. Although food alone may not eliminate anxiety or heal PPA, nutritional allies can contribute to a stable mood. Conversely, a lack of proper nourishment can exacerbate anxiety or even trigger it, since meal skipping or insufficient food can leave the body feeling fundamentally *unsafe* and thus instigate a state of fight-or-flight.

Supportive foods that "maximize nutrition, warmth and comfort" include broths, soups, eggs, fish (sardines, herring, mackerel), chicken, avocados, seeds (chia, flax, hemp, sesame, sunflower), nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts), whole grains (oats, quinoa, buckwheat), legumes (adzuki, chickpeas, lentils), cooked greens, root vegetables, mushrooms, seaweeds, berries, dried fruits (dates, figs, prunes), goat cheese and coconut milk. Foods to avoid postpartum include salads, raw vegetables, heavy meats (steak, organs), processed foods (crackers and chips), refined cooking oils, sugar, caffeine and alcohol [Ou, 113-117].

Food can be warmed not just through temperature but through warming herbs and spices as well, such as fennel, ginger, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, dill seed, rosemary, turmeric and even a little black pepper or cayenne. All of these spices are carminatives, so they stimulate blood flow in the digestive system, making them allies in the face of digestive upset, especially bloating or gas, which can be triggered by anxiety.

Another way to integrate herbal support into food is to cook with tea. For instance, oatmeal or other grains can be cooked in chamomile tea. Homemade broths are a versatile way to include herbs, especially roots, which benefit from long cooking times. For immune support, astragalus (sweet) or reishi (bitter - a little goes a long way) can be added to broths. Kombu adds umami flavor to broths and supports thyroid function.

A wonderful resource is the book *The first forty days : The essential art of nourishing the new mother* by Heng Ou. Her book is filled with delicious, nourishing recipes - including herbs - for the postpartum period. Ou takes inspiration from her lineage of Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners, including her own "Auntie Ou" who nurtured the author through her own first postpartum experience via the *Zuo yuezi* tradition, a 54-day protocol that shelters the mother by feeding her, keeping her warm, and doing household chores so that she may focus entirely on rest, recovery, and bonding with her newborn [Ou, 15]. Ou believes that when mothers are cared for after birth, they are less likely to experience mood disorders because rest, nourishment and helping hands can prevent a state of overwhelm that can lead to anxiety or depression.

Medicinal Mushroom immunity-boosting broth [Ou, 134]

Here is one sample recipe from Ou's book, slightly simplified. This could be eaten as a simple broth, or used as a base with the addition of other heartier ingredients, such as grains, legumes or chicken.

Onion, 1 - white or yellow, peeled & chopped
Leeks, 2 - green parts discarded, white part chopped into coin shapes
Shiitake Mushrooms - 2 cups fresh or 1 cup dried
Reishi Mushrooms - ½ cup (dried)
Cremini Mushrooms - 1 cup
Green Cabbage - 2 cups, chopped
Carrots - 2 medium, peeled & chopped
Tomatoes - 4, halved (seeds ok)
Parsley - 1 cup, chopped
Garlic cloves - 3, peeled & chopped
Ginger Root (fresh) - 2-inch, unpeeled & halved
Lemon zest - 2 tablespoons
Olive oil - 2 tablespoons
Kombu - 2 strips
Sea Salt - pinch

In a cooking pot, warm onions & leeks in oil with a pinch of salt over medium heat. Rinse Kombu & Mushrooms. Add Kombu, Mushrooms, Carrots, Tomatoes & Ginger, plus 3 quarts of water to the pot. Simmer for 40 minutes, then add Cabbage, Parsley & Lemon Zest and simmer for 20 more minutes. Turn off heat, add Garlic, and season with Salt (also Pepper, if desired). This can be frozen for later.

Supplements

Prenatal vitamins

- Continue taking prenatal vitamins while nursing to prevent depletion of basic nutrients.
- The baby will absorb many of the nutrients stored in the lactating parent's body; thus it is important for that parent to replenish their nutrient supply for their own health, as well.

Omega-3 fatty acids

- Up to 2,000 mg per day.
- Additionally, the proper ratio of omega-3s can help to reduce the overall inflammatory load in the body, including the brain. Any reduction in inflammation supports overall health & mood.
- Because brain health depends on adequate, quality fat in the diet, an insufficient amount may contribute to mood disorders, including anxiety [Harvard Medical School].

Magnesium glycinate

- Up to 500 mg per day, taken before bed to support restful sleep.
- The glycinate form helps to reduce anxiety by calming the nervous system, relaxing muscles and reducing back pain; it also helps to lower blood sugar & blood pressure levels [Kubala].
- While there is a lack of evidence that magnesium helps with PPA specifically, studies have demonstrated that it may help to reduce anxiety, as well as depression [Mabedi].

Conclusion

There is help for those with PPA. The initial step in addressing PPA is awareness. Parents and the people close to them need education on PPA so that they can take steps to prevent it, recognize it if it happens and know how to seek treatment. Preventative measures include rest, nourishment and helping hands to reduce feelings of overwhelm. Although some loss of sleep is inevitable in the postpartum period, minimizing sleep deprivation can help to stabilize mood and thus ward off extreme emotional states such as the excessive worrying that characterizes the PPA. If a parent begins to feel anxious, basic help with meals, housework and holding the baby may prevent anxiety from spinning out of control. And if PPA does occur, simply feeling heard can start the healing process, whether the listener is a friend, family, doctor, midwife or herbalist.

Encouragement for trying a holistic approach

Many birthing parents - 10% - experience anxiety during the postpartum period. The hormonal fluctuations, lack of adequate sleep, and major life changes are a recipe for potential anxiety, especially for individuals with a personal or family history of anxiety. For many people with PPA, the anxiety is temporary because it results from the confluence factors specific to the postpartum period. And for most people with PPA, their anxiety is not severe enough to require pharmaceutical treatment. For these people, a holistic approach for managing anxiety may be helpful and worth exploring before turning to psychiatric medications, in order to avoid possible medication side effects for both the parent and baby, if the baby is breastfeeding. Herbs can be an ally for people with PPA because they are accessible, affordable (for most) and safer than psychiatric medications while still being effective. Plus, they are often enjoyable - such as a cup of delicious, calming tea. Some herbs that alleviate anxiety are gentle (Chamomile), while others are stronger and thus require careful dosage (California Poppy). When working with anxiolytic herbs, it is critical to take the proper dose, under the guidance of a qualified herbalist who can provide safe instructions for taking herbs postpartum. In this paper, asterisks appear alongside herbs that can help with PPA but require a low dose during lactation. For a full list of herbs to take cautiously, see section entitled, *Plants to be used with caution during lactation*.

Integrating professional mental health support

Each client has a unique healing journey. Herbalists can help clients navigate their journeys by connecting them with other appropriate care, beyond herbs. When working with clients experiencing PPA, herbalists should have referrals ready for professional mental health support: therapists who specialize in perinatal mood disorders. While an herbalist may be able to help reduce a person's anxiety by listening to their story, it is essential to recognize the limits of care that one is trained to provide. In some cases, a client will desire or need the concurrent care of a therapist. Sometimes, that professional mental health support will include psychiatric medications, such as SSRIs. As widely the respected midwife, herbalist and OB/GYN Aviva Romm points out, "because untreated PPD - [and by extension, PPA] - can have significant and long-term consequences for [the birthing parent], child and family, a careful risk-benefit comparison must be done for use of medication versus nonpharmacologic treatment" [Romm, *Botanical medicine*, 422]. When the potential risks of mood disorders pose a greater threat to the parent and baby than medication side effects, these medications are warranted as harm reduction. When a client requires pharmaceutical intervention, the herbalist's role may include making suggestions to mitigate potential medication side effects on breastfed babies, and offering recommendations for complementary herbs, or herbs to help with the weaning process off of drugs, should that happen later. Although herbalists should be knowledgeable of contraindications and drug-herb interactions, they should also encourage clients to check with their doctors before taking herbs.

Warning signs warranting medical intervention

In extreme cases, clients may need medical intervention if their anxiety turns into postpartum psychosis. As mentioned before, PPP is rare. Only 1-5 out of every 1,000 birthing parents experience PPP, compared to 1 out of every 10 birthing parents experiencing PPA. Signs of PPP include delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, agitation, manic behavior and thoughts of harming oneself or others [Cleveland Clinic, *Postpartum psychosis*]. These symptoms can arise out of PPA and come on suddenly, which is why it is important to watch for any drastic changes in the degree of anxiety. If an herbalist suspects a client may have developed PPP, they must contact the client's doctor immediately because PPP is potentially life-threatening [Bergink].

Quick Tips for Herbalists Supporting People with PPA

Listen with compassion

There is valuable medicine in holding space for another person's experience.

Recommend relaxing nervines that are safest during lactation for immediate relief

California Poppy,* Catnip, Chamomile, Damiana, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Linden, Motherwort, Passionflower, Skullcap (dried), Rose, Tulsi, Vervain, Wood Betony.

Simultaneously, recommend safe nervous system tonics for long-term support

Ashwagandha, Milky Oats (fresh), Reishi, Schisandra, Skullcap (fresh).

Customized approach for the client

- Find a balancing match for your client's constitution and acute condition.
- Include nervines with crossover indications based on physical manifestations of anxiety.
- Keep it simple - recommend herbal preparations that are accessible, fast & easy.

Nervines with crossover indications to help with common manifestations of anxiety

- Muscle tension: Black Cohosh,* Hops, Passionflower
- Hypertension: Hawthorn, Lavender, Linden, Motherwort, Valerian*
- Heart palpitations: Hawthorn, Lemon Balm, Linden, Motherwort, Valerian*
- Digestive distress: Catnip, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Hops, Lemon Balm, Licorice*
- Insomnia: Ashwagandha, Hops, Lavender, Passionflower, Skullcap, Wild Lettuce, Valerian*
- Obsessive thoughts: Passionflower, Valerian,* Vervain
- Confusion: Gotu Kola, Rosemary
- Panic: Pasque Flower (essence)

Track the arc of anxiety

Is their mood improving or worsening?

Watch for signs of postpartum psychosis

Delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, agitation, manic behavior & thoughts of harming oneself or others.

Have referrals ready for professional mental health care

Therapists specializing in postpartum care, especially perinatal mood disorders, including PPA.

Harm reduction approach - this is nuanced!

- Support your client in their unique path, which may include taking SSRIs if PPA is severe.
- Offer to recommend herbs that complement medications, possibly allowing lower drug dosage.
- Also offer recommendations for the weaning process if a client decides to transition off medication.

Educate clients on how to mitigate SSRI side effects for breastfed babies

- If possible, wait until the baby is 2 weeks old (adjust to gestational age) before starting SSRIs.
- Pick an SSRI that has been studied for its side effects on breastfed babies (lowest is Luvox).
- Take the lowest effective dose of SSRI & start slowly, with guidance from the client's doctor.
- Avoid nursing at the time of peak concentration for the drug in breastmilk (pump & dump).

Lifestyle recommendations

- Cuddle with baby - a lot.
- Ask for help - with anything!
- Breathwork - try practicing while nursing the baby.
- Prioritize sleep over chores - mental health matters more than a clean house & this is only a phase.
- Nutrition - maintain stable blood sugar with nourishing foods to help stabilize mood.
- Talk about your feelings and stay in touch with other parents of babies.

Indications above largely informed by herbalist Jill Stansbury's "Herbal specifics for anxiety" [V. 4, 101].

Cautions and Contraindications

*Herbs to be used with caution during lactation

For these plants, it is safest to take the lowest effective dose and it is best to engage with them only during acute situations, if possible; or, for long-term support, it is best to take regular breaks.

California Poppy, Dong Quai, Peony, St. John's Wort [Romm *Botanical medicine*, 424]; Alkanet, Basil, Black Cohosh, Bladderwrack, Bugleweed, Chinese Rhubarb, Coltsfoot, Elecampane, Joe Pye, Licorice, Male Fern, Purging Buckthorn, Stillingia, [Romm, *Natural health after birth*, 424]; Valerian.

Herbs contraindicated during lactation

Mimosa [Camila].

Kava Kava [Romm, 424].

Aloe, Borage, Buckthorn bark, Cascara Sagrada, Comfrey root and leaf, Life root, Me Huang (Ephedra), Mayapple root, Petasites root, Poke root, Pulsatilla, Rhubarb root, Rue, Sage, Senna, Wild Ginger root (Asarum canadense & Asarum caudatum, *not* Zingiber officinale) [Kuhn, 532].

Aconite, American Helebores, Belladonna, Bitter Almond, Bloodroot, Boxwood, Calamus, Chinatree, Digitalis, Eastern Red Cedar, Epazote, Germander, Ginkgo, Goat's Rue, Golden Eye Grass, Indian root, Jaborandi, Jalap, Juniper, Lily of the Valley, Ma Dou Ling, Madagascar Periwinkle, Mandrake, Maturin, Marijuana, Mistletoe, Myrrh, Mugwort, Ocotillo, Osha, Prickly Ash, Rue, Scopolia, Scotch Broom, Skunk Cabbage, Spreading Dogbane, Tansy, Thuja, Tonka, Tree of Heaven, Virginia Snakeroot, Wahoo, Wild Carrot, Wormwood [California School of Herbal Studies, citing McGuffin, Winston, Crawford & Low Dog, Moore].

Author's Story

I believe in plant medicine. However, if I could suggest only one intervention for the postpartum period, it would be to prioritize rest. While herbal remedies are most effective when tailored to the individual, the healing power of rest is universally applicable. And while rest alone will not cure everything, it will help to mitigate most health problems, both physical and emotional. Circumstances are not this simple for everyone, but if the choice is between folding laundry or napping while your baby naps, then nap! This is temporary. Sleep is more important than accomplishing household chores because rest - or the lack of it - can make a huge difference in mental health. Minimizing postpartum sleep deprivation can save a person from PPA. I know from my own experience that sleeping whenever I could with my second baby helped my state of mind.

And yet, I still experienced PPA after the birth of my second child, due to a traumatic experience. I share my story here to impart how simple an herbal intervention can be, and still be very effective. I took three tonic herbs for my anxiety postpartum and found their support to be immensely helpful for my nervous system.

The short version of my story is that after my baby was born (a month before his "due date") I felt that I was having the most relaxing postpartum experience I could have imagined. Since it was my second baby, I wasn't going through the shock of becoming a parent. And while all babies are different, my experience came in handy over and over. Ultimately, it felt a thousand times easier than with my first baby. Until day twelve. My baby started breathing rapidly and my intuition took over - I knew it was serious. We took him to the ER and after a day of tests we found out he had the start of a UTI. Luckily, we discovered it early enough that he had no dire or lasting consequences. The biggest relief! But, despite that, after we returned home I spun out into the worst anxiety of my life. I was hypervigilant, afraid that I might miss important signals of

illness if I didn't check my baby's temperature constantly or stay awake at night to monitor his breathing. I had gone from experiencing situationally appropriate anxiety to ambient and excessive worrying: PPA.

I am prone to anxiety but prior to this experience I had found much relief from my plant allies. With herbal remedies, I had learned how to balance my nervous system toward a default state of calm. PPA reminded me of how crushing it is to feel anxious all the time. I needed help - new medicine for this acute problem.

I consulted with my own beloved herbalist. Sharing my story and feeling heard was medicinal already. She suggested two simple interventions: Skullcap tincture made from the fresh plant to help restore my nerves, and Reishi tincture to provide calming adaptogenic support to help stabilize my mood and bolster my immune system during this time of interrupted sleep. In addition to those plants, I also took a Gotu Kola tincture for its immediate anxiolytic effects. Of all anxiolytics, I chose Gotu Kola because of the overlapping nootropic support it gave my "mom brain" and because it is indicated for hyperextended joints and stretched or injured ligaments [Cech, 186], which I experienced in my hips as a lasting complication from pregnancy.

It was helpful to combine two herbs for long-term nervous system support with one for prompt relief from anxiety. In addition to these herbs that I took two to three times daily, I also had a nervine flower blend for moments of rising panic. This was just the leftovers from a formula that I had created for a friend's child with anxiety. Since it was child-safe, it was also safe during lactation, so I could call on these plants as often as needed throughout the day - a few drops of Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Linden, Passionflower and Lavender.

Beyond herbs, I also had a profound exchange with a therapist who helped me move past my anxiety. In our single session together, I explained that before my baby got sick, I had felt so relaxed. She pointed out that when it really counted, it was not necessary for me to be in a state of hypervigilance to protect my baby. Although this insight did not instantly cure my anxiety, I repeated it as a mantra and over time I began to believe it. And that's the other thing: time. Herbs combined with professional mental health support, plus napping when my baby napped, *and* time - enough time to witness my baby not getting sick and time for my nervous system to recalibrate all helped me to recover from PPA and return to a general state of equanimity.



Resources

Books

Alfs, Matthew. *300 herbs : Their indications & contraindications*. New Brighton : Old Theology Book House, 2020.

Cech, Richo. *Making plant medicine*. Williams : Herbal Reads, 2016.

Easley, Thomas, and Steven Horne. *The modern herbal dispensatory : A medicine-making guide*. Berkeley : North Atlantic Books, 2016.

Forêt, Rosalee de la. *Alchemy of herbs*. New York : Hay House Inc. 2017.

Hoffman, David. *The holistic herbal*. Longmead : Element Books Ltd, 1988.

Hoffman, David. *Medicinal herbalism : The science and practice of herbal medicine*. Rochester : Healing Arts Press, 2003.

Gladstar, Rosemary. *Medicinal herbs : A beginner's guide*. North Adams : Storey Publishing, 2012.

Gladstar, Rosemary. *Herbal healing for women*. New York : Fireside, 1993.

Kaufer, Lanny. *Medicinal herbs of California : A field guide to common healing plants*. Guilford : Falcon. 2021.

Kuhn, Merrily A., and David Winston. *Herbal therapy & supplements : A scientific and traditional approach*. Philadelphia : Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2008.

Ou, Heng. *The first forty days : The essential art of nourishing the new mother*. New York : Abrams. 2016.

Ody, Penelope. *Herbs for a healthy pregnancy*. Los Angeles : Keats Publishing, 1999.

Romm, Aviva. *Botanical medicine for women's health*. St. Louis : Churchill Livingstone, 2010.

Romm, Aviva. *Natural health after birth : The complete guide to postpartum wellness*. Rochester : Healing Arts Press, 2002.

Romm, Aviva. *The natural pregnancy book*. Berkeley : Ten Speed Press, 1997.

Stansbury, Jill. *Herbal formularies for health professionals, Volume 3 : Endocrinology, including the adrenal and thyroid systems, metabolic endocrinology, and the reproductive systems*. White River Junction, Vermont : Chelsea Green Publishing. 2018.

Stansbury, Jill. *Herbal formularies for health professionals, Volume 4 : Neurology, psychiatry, and pain management, including cognitive and neurologic conditions and emotional conditions*. White River Junction, Vermont : Chelsea Green Publishing. 2020.

Verinder, Erin Lovell. *Plants for the people : A modern guide to plant medicine*. New York : Thames & Hudson, 2020.

Winston, David, and Steven Maimes. *Adaptogens : Herbs for strength, stamina and stress relief*. Rochester : Healing Arts Press, 2007.

Online Resources

American Psychological Association [APA]. *What is cognitive behavioral therapy?* 2017:
<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral>

Armstrong, Carrie. ACOG Guidelines on psychiatric medication use during pregnancy and lactation. American Family Physician. 2008: <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2008/0915/p772.html>.

Bach Remedies. *The story of 5 flower essences*. Bach Original Flower Remedies. 2022:
<https://www.bachremedies.com/en-ca/about/bach-and-rescue-remedy/>

Bergink, Veerle, et al. *Treatment of psychosis and mania in the postpartum period*. The American journal of psychiatry. 2015:
[https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13121652#:~:text=Although%20the%20efficacy%20of%20antipsychotics,psychosis%20and%20mania%20\(15\).](https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13121652#:~:text=Although%20the%20efficacy%20of%20antipsychotics,psychosis%20and%20mania%20(15).)

Burt, Vivien K., et al. *The use of psychotropic medications during breast-feeding*. American Journal of Psychiatry. 2001: <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.158.7.1001>

Camila, Renée, *Discerning nervines*. The Herbal Highway. 2023:
<https://kpfa.org/episode/the-herbal-highway-february-2-2023/>

Chaoyu, Liu; Ystrom, Eivind; and McAdams, Tom A. *Long-term maternal and child outcomes following postnatal SSRI treatment*. National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2023:
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10466165/>

Cleveland Clinic. *Benzodiazepines*. 2023:
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/24570-benzodiazepines-benzos>

Cleveland Clinic. *Postpartum anxiety*. 2022:
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22693-postpartum-anxiety>

Cleveland Clinic. *Postpartum psychosis*. 2022:
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24152-postpartum-psychosis>

Collier, Stephanie. *Postpartum anxiety is invisible, but common and treatable*. Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School. 2021.
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/postpartum-anxiety-an-invisible-disorder-that-can-affect-new-mothers-202107302558>

Copperstate Ob/Gyn. *Adjusting your Hormones Postpartum*. 2023:
<https://www.copperstateobgyn.com/adjusting-your-hormones-postpartum/>

Harvard, *Omega-3s*. Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School. 2019:
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/omega-3s-for-anxiety>

Kohl, Johannes; Autry, Anita E.; and Dulac, Catherine. *The neurobiology of parenting : A neural circuit perspective*. BioEssays. 2016. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bies.201600159>

Kubala, Jillian. *Health benefits of magnesium glycinate*. Health. 2024:

<https://www.health.com/magnesium-glycinate-8415806#:~:text=Magnesium%20glycinate%20is%20an%20absorbable.anxiety%2C%20and%20improve%20sleep%20quality>.

Maguire, Jamie. *Chapter 12 : Hormonal and immunological factors in postpartum psychosis*, pages 159-179.

Biomarkers of Postpartum Psychiatric Disorders. Cambridge : Academic Press, 2020:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780128155080000126>

Mabedi, Mahdi. *Magnesium supplementation beneficially affects depression in adults with depressive disorder : A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials*. Front Psychiatry. National

Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2022: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.881111>

Mayo Clinic. *Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)*. 2019:

[https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/ssris/art-20044825#:~:text=SSRIs%20treat%20depression%20by%20increasing.reuptake\)%20of%20serotonin%20into%20neurons](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/ssris/art-20044825#:~:text=SSRIs%20treat%20depression%20by%20increasing.reuptake)%20of%20serotonin%20into%20neurons).

Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women's Mental Health, Reproductive Psychiatry Resource & Information Center (MGH). *Breastfeeding and psychiatric medications : How safe is it for women to take medications and breastfeed?* 2024:

<https://womensmentalhealth.org/specialty-clinics-2/breastfeeding-and-psychiatric-medication-2/>

Monogr, Mens Sana. *Lactating mother and psychotropic drugs*. National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2010: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3031938/>

Mountain Rose. *Golden milk powder blend*. 2020:

<https://blog.mountainroseherbs.com/golden-milk-powder-recipe>

Nash, Jo. *7 Best breathwork techniques & exercises to use*. Positive Psychology. 2023:

<https://positivepsychology.com/breathwork-techniques/>

Nonacs, Ruta. *Can Paxil (Paroxetine) be used while breastfeeding?*

Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women's Mental Health, Reproductive Psychiatry Resource & Information Center (MGH). 2007:

<https://womensmentalhealth.org/posts/ask-the-experts-can-paxil-paroxetine-be-used-while-breastfeeding/>

Romm, Aviva. *Herbal remedies for anxiety and panic attacks*. The journal.

<https://avivaromm.com/7-herbs-anxiety/>

Romm, Aviva. *Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADS): The hidden motherhood struggle*.

2022. <https://avivaromm.com/pmads/>

Romm, Aviva. *Reishi powered adaptogen hot cocoa*. 2024: <https://avivaromm.com/reishi-hot-chocolate/>

Tripathi, B. M.; and Majumder, Pradipta. *Lactating mother and psychotropic drugs*. National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information. 2010:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3031938/>

Worth, Tammy. *SSRIs : Everything you need to know*. WebMD. 2024:

<https://www.webmd.com/depression/ssris-myths-and-facts-about-antidepressants>

