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**Valerian**

Valerian (*Valeriana Officinalis),* also known as Valerian Root (or Setwall), is a medicinal herb that can be traced back to Western Europe. The dried valerian root can be prepared as teas or extracts that is manufactured into capsules or tablets for oral ingestion. On these products, it is often labeled to induce sleep and aid those suffering with insomnia. It's off label use often includes treatment of anxiety, stress, depression, attention deficit disorder, chronic fatigue syndrome, tremors, epilepsy and menopause symptoms. (*For product images of how it appears in nature and as packaged for the consumer please turn to page 3).* The valerian herb is native to Western Europe but can be grown anywhere in the spring and summer seasons and/or with warm temperatures, sufficient sunlight and water. According to Gaia Herbs, their valerian plants are grown in North Carolina. Valerian is categorized as a dietary supplement; therefore, the FDA does not regulate the manufacturing and distribution processes of companies that are producing valerian supplements.

Common side effects of valerian oral capsules include headache, upset stomach, dry mouth, feeling of excitement or uneasiness, strange dreams and daytime drowsiness. Drug interactions may cause additive therapeutic and adverse effects if taken with sedatives or with herbs/dietary supplements/medications with sedative properties. This includes benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, Ativan, and Halcion), Barbiturates/CNS depressants such as phenobarbital (Luminal), morphine, dietary supplements such as kava, melatonin and St. John’s wort. Lastly, the most common adverse oral manifestation from valerian oral capsules is xerostomia.

Xanax (benzodiazepine) or Ambien (zolpidem) are known prescription medications that can be compared to valerian. Valerian can be attractive to the consumer because it does not require a prescription and a simple Google search will reveal its long history of medicinal use for insomnia. The consumer can find valerian, online, in their local pharmacy and/or supermarket. As a health educator, I believe that natural herbs and supplements need to be carefully studied because it may become harmful to the patient if administered incorrectly and/or over ingested. Sources on these dietary supplements can be verified by identifying whether or not it is an unbiased academic source, scientific article or published report by reputable authors and institutions.

As a dental hygienist, discussing the patient’s main use of valerian supplements in a calm and comfortable manner will help me better understand the possible associated risks and drug interactions, as well as building rapport. Reviewing their medical history will provide me with details such as prescribed drugs or supplements that the patient is taking other than valerian. It is known that Valerian will cause additive therapeutic effects and additional adverse effects if taken with drugs mentioned above. Valerian is contraindicated if the patient is pregnant or breastfeeding because it is not known if valerian is teratogenic and/or capable of harming the baby through breast milk. It is recommended that the patient should always consult with their primary care physician prior to taking any dietary supplements.

References

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