



# Research Summary: Remedies #1

As featured in Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt's video:  
"5 Natural Remedies I Keep in My Medicine Cabinet (That Actually Work)"  
Date of Publication: 05/07/2026

## Research Context:

This week's topic explores how herbal remedies are often misunderstood in both conventional and wellness conversations. Many people build a natural medicine cabinet the same way they build a supplement stack: one product for stress, another for digestion, another for immunity, and another for sleep. But the body rarely works in isolated categories like that.

From a functional medicine perspective, herbs and tinctures are not simply symptom tools. They interact with communication networks involving the nervous system, digestion, immune signaling, inflammation, and stress physiology. This is why the same person may experience fatigue, bloating, poor sleep, and frequent illness at the same time rather than as unrelated problems.

## Key Findings from the Research:

### Study 1 (PMID 39348746):

A 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis evaluated how ashwagandha affected stress, anxiety, and cortisol levels across multiple human clinical trials. Researchers found that people taking ashwagandha generally experienced lower stress scores, reduced anxiety symptoms, and measurable reductions in cortisol, one of the body's primary stress hormones. Cortisol is part of the HPA axis, which is the communication network between your brain and adrenal glands that helps coordinate your stress response. What makes this important is that the herb was not simply acting like a sedative. Instead, the findings suggest it may help regulate how the body responds to ongoing stress exposure. For many people, chronic stress shows up physically through poor sleep, digestive shifts, fatigue, increased inflammation, or feeling "wired but tired."

### Study 2 (PMID 34851546):

This systematic review and meta-analysis examined herbal therapies used for functional dyspepsia, a digestive pattern involving bloating, heaviness after meals, upper abdominal discomfort, reflux-like symptoms, and slow digestion. Researchers found that herbal approaches improved digestive symptoms more often than placebo groups, suggesting that certain herbs may help support digestive function through multiple pathways rather than a single mechanism. One of the key ideas here involves digestive signaling. Bitter herbs stimulate receptors on the tongue and throughout the digestive tract that help prepare the body for food. This can increase stomach acid, digestive enzymes, and bile flow, all of which are important for breaking food down efficiently and extracting nutrients. In everyday terms, this research supports the idea that digestion is not only about the food itself.

### Study 3 (PMID 38667040):

This systematic review focused on allostatic load, a concept that describes the total stress burden your body carries over time from repeated adaptation. Researchers found that higher allostatic load is consistently associated with poorer health outcomes across multiple systems, including cardiovascular, metabolic, and immune health. Instead of a single event causing breakdown, the body accumulates the effects of stress, pressure, and recovery gaps over time. In practical terms, this supports the idea that fatigue is often not caused by one bad night of sleep or one stressful week. It reflects a longer pattern of cumulative demand. The body keeps track of what it has been asked to handle, even when you continue to function.



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## Functional Medicine Connections:

Here's where these studies begin to connect into a larger picture:

Your nervous system, digestion, immune system, inflammation pathways, and stress response are constantly communicating with each other. What looks like separate symptoms on the surface, such as fatigue, bloating, poor sleep, anxiety, frequent illness, or brain fog, may actually reflect stress and dysfunction spreading across interconnected systems rather than isolated problems.

This is one reason functional medicine focuses so heavily on patterns. Chronic stress can disrupt digestion. Poor digestion can influence immune signaling and inflammation. Ongoing inflammation can affect mood, sleep quality, and energy production. Herbs and tinctures may influence these patterns because many contain multiple active compounds interacting with several communication pathways simultaneously.

The goal is not simply suppressing symptoms, but understanding what your body may be trying to communicate underneath them.

## Practical Reflections & Takeaways:

Think about your own patterns for a moment. Do your stress levels, digestion, sleep quality, energy, and immune symptoms tend to fluctuate together rather than separately?

Many people notice that periods of high stress are followed by bloating, poor sleep, fatigue, increased cravings, frequent illness, or feeling mentally "off." Those overlaps may not be random. They can be clues that your body's communication systems are under strain rather than isolated parts failing independently.

It's also worth reflecting on how differently people respond to the same supplement or herb. One person may feel calmer or sleep better, while another notices no benefit or even feels worse. That variability matters.

Your body's response is shaped by context, including stress load, inflammation, digestion, sleep patterns, hormone balance, and nervous system regulation.

## Want Dr. Kenny's Eyes on Your Case?



## References:

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