

The Nervous System and  
**Nervine Tonics**

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# The Nervous System and Nervine Tonics

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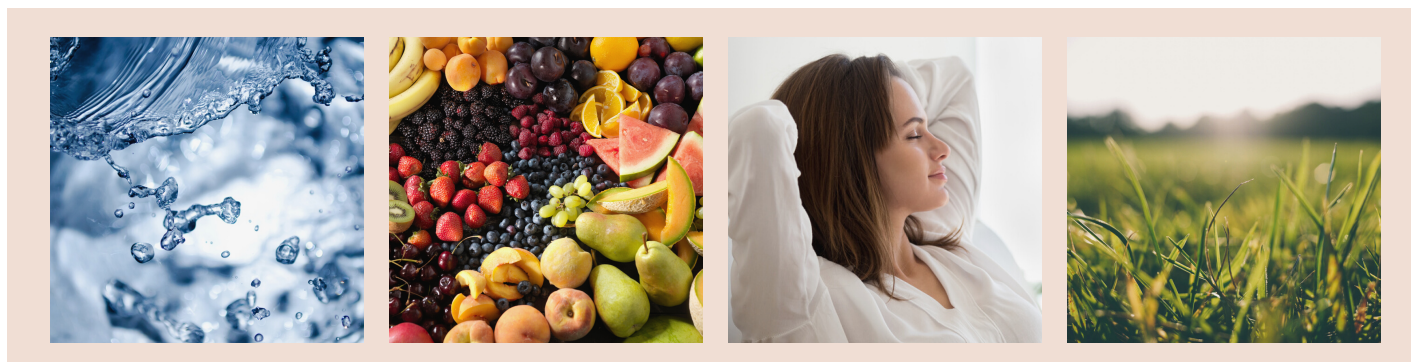


Did you know that your body contains billions (yes, billions!) of neurons?<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be understated how important the nervous system is not only to our survival but also to our quality of life. Since we're all searching for the best life possible, it's important that we take the time to nourish this important system. So, how can we help to keep the nervous system healthy? Nervine tonics may offer part of the solution!

Nervine herbs are a category of herbs that directly support the nervous system's functions. Nervines have various effects depending on the specific herb, such as calming, stimulating, or nourishing the nervous system.<sup>2</sup> Nervine tonics, which are the focus of this article, can strengthen and nourish this vital system.

All herbs and supplements provide the most benefits when our foundational lifestyle choices are also addressed. These Foundations of Health, as described in our coursework, include food, water, breathwork, sunlight, exercise, rest, balanced emotions, body and energy work, and spirituality. Furthermore, we must remember that herbs are not substitutes for maintaining our foundations, nor should we take them like medications.<sup>3</sup> They should not be taken to mask, cure, or treat. Instead, nervine tonics should be used to support the nervous system to revitalize itself after consulting with a certified herbalist and medical professional. This is especially vital for sensitive populations such as children, elderly individuals, or those with medical conditions that may or may not require the use of medication.



# How to Know if Your Nervous System May Need Support

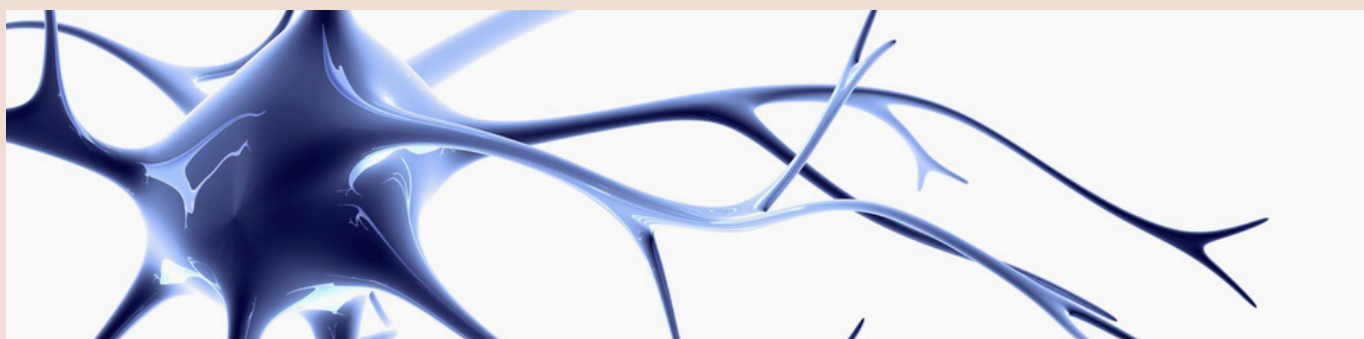
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First, let's learn a little more about the nervous system. Our billions of neurons are tasked with a multitude of functions, including mental activity, resting, movement, organ function, and sensation.<sup>4,5</sup> We have two classifications of nervous system function, autonomic and somatic. The autonomic nervous system functions involuntarily and unconsciously. The somatic nervous system includes conscious, thought-driven processes, such as actions to direct our body to move.<sup>6</sup>

Often people believe that adrenal gland function is to blame for feeling out of sorts after a stressful period.<sup>7</sup> But, the nervous system controls these glands, and if the system can't recalibrate and recover from stress, even positive stress like going on vacation, then normal function may not resume, leading to chronic problems. Some examples that can indicate that the nervous system may need support include:<sup>8</sup>

- Insomnia
- Feelings associated with anxiety and depression
- Restlessness
- Tension
- Digestive Issues
- Lack of concentration
- Feeling exhausted
- Worrying

If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional or mental health symptoms, it's important that you seek help from a mental or general health provider.



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# Nurture the Nervous System with Nervine Tonics

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Nervine tonics, a subcategory of nervine herbs, can help restore, nourish, and strengthen the nervous system.<sup>9</sup> Again, it's always important to determine which effects and types of nervines and nervine tonics may be most beneficial by consulting a natural health practitioner or certified herbalist. If you decide to try nervine herbs or tonics, talk with your medical professional to evaluate potential drug interactions and ensure they are safe for you.

Here are some commonly used nervine tonics that can nourish and restore the nervous system:



## 1) Oats

Oats in herbal forms are different than the oats we eat. When used herbally, oats, also known as “Avena Sativa,” are considered a “food category herb.”<sup>10</sup> Oats consist of the milky seed (typically used for nervine purposes), the mature seed (what we eat for breakfast), oat straw (stems and leaves), bran (oat beta-glucan), and whole oat groats. The outer husk should be removed since we cannot digest it. Oats are generally and likely safe to use except where a contraindication is present.<sup>11</sup> For example, people with gluten intolerances and associated conditions should avoid using oat.<sup>12</sup>

Oats are high in nutrients that the nervous system needs to function properly.<sup>13</sup> Oats are great for people who have a depleted nervous system and function on nervous energy or caffeine. It can be helpful for individuals who overwork and undernourish themselves. Oats can feed and replenish the nervous system of those who are continuously under stress and experience feelings and symptoms associated with burnout and depression.<sup>14</sup>

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## 2) Scullcap

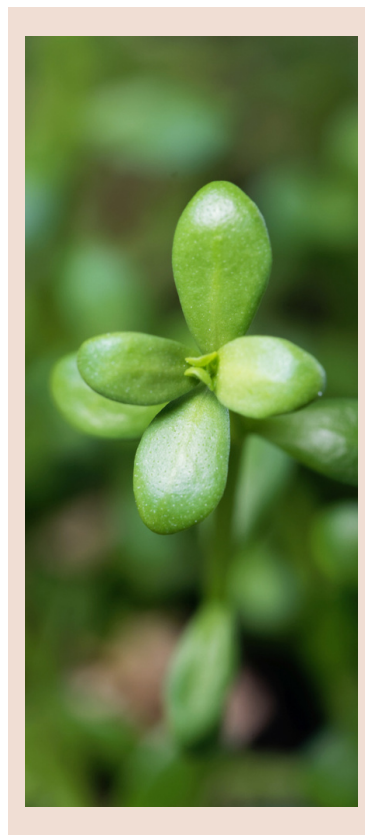
In addition to its nervine tonic functions, scullcap also has mild sedative and anti-spasmodic properties. It is a good match for hardworking individuals who have strong emotions and experience nervous and muscular tension.<sup>15</sup>

Generally, it can be used for muscle and nerve tension and irritability. Scullcap is also beneficial for nervous system disorders where “twitching, tremors, restlessness, or irregular muscular action” are present.<sup>16</sup> Herbalist and author of *The Herbal Medicine-Maker Handbook: A Home Manual*, James Green, states that scullcap has a cardiac relaxant property and, therefore, is helpful in “sedating heart imbalances caused by overactive nerves[.]”<sup>17</sup>

## 3) Bacopa

Bacopa, also known as Brahmi and Herb of Grace<sup>18</sup>, is a nervine tonic with antioxidant, cognitive and memory enhancement, and anti-inflammatory effects.<sup>19</sup> Bacopa has a 3000-year-long history in Ayurvedic medicine, and practitioners use it to promote longevity and increase brain function. It is also used for nervous system disorders like anxiety and insomnia. Bacopa can increase circulation to the brain, improving memory, mental performance, and general cognitive function.<sup>20</sup>

Bacopa is generally safe, but side effects can occur. It is not recommended for women who are pregnant or for people who are taking certain medications.<sup>21</sup> In very large doses, it can be toxic to the body.<sup>22</sup> These cautions and others listed above demonstrate how imperative it is to check with a medical professional and certified herbalist before using herbs to ensure safety and proper use. A mental health professional can also provide support when applicable symptoms are present.



## Conclusion:

When the nervous system needs nourishment, nervine herb tonics can offer support when used correctly, safely, and in conjunction with healthy lifestyle foundations, such as food choices, water intake, rest, and spirituality. To learn more about herbs and nervine properties, enroll in our online 16-week Certified Master Herbalist program taught by instructors with practical experience. Visit [trinityschool.org/program/CMH](http://trinityschool.org/program/CMH) or call 800-428-0408, option 2, to learn more.

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