Ashwagandha for Cardiorespiratory Endurance

THEORY:
Ashwagandha is a known adaptogen, valued for its ability to increase vitality, energy, endurance and stamina, suggesting it could enhance physical performance. The question is whether a high concentration root extract of ashwagandha could enhance cardiorespiratory endurance and improve quality of life (QOL) in healthy athletic adults.

IMPACT:
As adults look to get more yield from their workouts, improving VO$_2$ max—or the amount of oxygen the body can use during exercise—supports muscle efficiency and performance. Further, quality of life measures are critical to ensuring exercise enhances both physical and psychological measures. Ayurvedic formulas known as Rasayana—such as ashwagandha—have been used as a remedy for general weakness and to improve vitality and stamina; however, research was needed to prove clinical efficacy. The study results suggest ashwagandha (as KSM-66) enhances both cardiorespiratory endurance and quality of life in healthy, athletic adults.

OUTCOME:
Over the course of the study and at conclusion, in adults taking ashwagandha:

- VO$_2$ max increased by 4.91% at eight weeks, and by 5.67% at 12 weeks
- Quality of life (QOL) measures were positively affected, with social relationships up 9.46% from baseline and subdomains physical health up 7.6% from baseline.
- Environmental impact on QOL also increased significantly by the end of the study
- No changes were seen in vital parameters such as pulse rate, blood pressure or respiration at rest
- All changes were statistically significant compared to placebo.

Researchers concluded: “High-concentration full-spectrum Ashwagandha root extract improves an individual’s resistance toward stress and thereby improves self-assessed quality of life.”

PARAMETERS:
A prospective, double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial at Hyderabad Spine Clinics, Secunderabad, India. A total of 50 healthy adults aged between 20 and 45 years and normal body mass index (BMI) received 300 mg twice daily of ashwagandha (as KSM-66) or placebo for 12 weeks. Efficacy was evaluated by conducting a 20-minute Shuttle Run Test at baseline, week 8 and week 12, with a look at oxygen consumption at peak physical exertion (VO$_2$max); and quality of life assessed by a self-reported World Health Organization-QOL questionnaire.

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