

Anxiety and How to Deal with It

Nancy Russell, M.D. April, 2019

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. It may however occur out of the blue without an obvious cause. When you are constantly worried, you may be irritable, impatient, and restless and have a hard time sleeping. Non-stop worrying is hard on your health, causing headaches, tight, painful muscles, and digestive upset. Relationships can suffer as family and friends tire of hearing about your constant concerns.

Above is a description of generalized anxiety disorder, or (GAD). Other types of anxiety include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder, severe shyness (social anxiety disorder, or (SAD), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Nutrient deficiencies, neurotransmitter imbalances and hormonal imbalances can cause or make anxiety worse. The most common nutrient deficiencies that can be associated with anxiety are thiamin (vitamin B1), Niacin, vitamin B-6, vitamin B-12, pantothenic acid (vitamin B-5), magnesium and vitamin D. In high doses, thiamin 500 mg three times a day can be highly effective in treating anxiety. A general B complex can also be helpful.

Other nutrients that can be helpful for anxiety are herbal remedies. These include passionflower extract, magnolia officinalis, valerian root, lemon balm and others. These herbs can be taken in the form of capsules, tinctures or aromatherapy. Young Living has a new combination roll-on topical aromatherapy called Stress-Away. Essential oils can also be diffused into the air. If you have animals or young children, research which oils are not to be used around them.

Neurotransmitter imbalances that are inherited and modified by lifestyle that affect anxiety include high or low GABA, high glutamate, high serotonin, high epinephrine or norepinephrine (catecholamines). These neurotransmitters can be evaluated by special laboratories using a dehydrated, morning urine sample. When the levels are determined, there are supplements to help balance neurotransmitters that contain specific amino acids, herbs and co-factors such as B vitamins and magnesium. For example, theanine, an amino acid found in green tea can be a treatment for anxiety. It also can help with mental alertness in doses of 50 to 200 mg. It is calming but not sedating.

Hormonal issues that can lead to anxiety can be an overactive thyroid gland (hyperthyroidism), overactive adrenal gland with high cortisol and low progesterone with (estrogen dominance) or low estrogen. Low testosterone in men can contribute to anxiety. These levels can be evaluated with blood levels or saliva levels and supplemented with bio-identical hormone therapy or herbal treatment.

Other avenues to help with anxiety are with counseling to get to the root of the anxiety feelings. Cognitive behavioral therapy, biofeedback and neuro-feedback are a few types of therapies that can be helpful. A good counselor can teach you relaxation techniques

that are very simple to practice while you are doing well, so when anxiety hits, you will be prepared with some tools to use to combat it. Learning to express your emotions, especially anger and other suppressed feelings can relieve anxiety.

Sugar and caffeine can aggravate anxiety and panic by an imbalance in blood sugar and rattle the nerves. Theanine-containing green tea is okay because the theanine usually offsets the small amount of caffeine in the green tea.

Panic attacks are severe anxiety reactions and often associated with hyperventilation. With hyperventilation, carbon dioxide is blown off which can cause lightheadedness, a feeling of not being able to catch your breath, chest pain, numbness and tingling in the fingers and around the mouth, a spacey or disembodied feeling or even a impending doom feeling. The reason this serious reaction can happen is often due to buried feelings and usually accompanied with a low magnesium. Repressed anger and other feelings need to be expressed and acknowledged and released without harming others. You can tell when anger is healthy because it feels good to express it. Also, it's often a healthy way of standing up for yourself. When it starts feeling bad, release it with deep breathing, prayer time, journalling, using a punching bag or pillow, or ripping up paper or talking it out with a good friend or therapist. There is a healing power in feeling your feelings and expressing them in an appropriate way.

If anxiety, panic attacks or PTSD are overwhelming and not helped with natural therapies, prescription medication is sometimes necessary. If medication is required and you would like to explore ways to get off of it slowly and safely, consult your physician or functional medicine practitioner.