

Integrative Approaches to Anxiety

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Introduction

- While medication can be helpful for anxiety, there are several non-pharmacologic options, which can support treatment and in certain cases address the problem at the root and obviate the need for medication.
- The most effective integrative treatments for anxiety are exercise, getting adequate sleep, decreasing caffeine, blood sugar stabilization, yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, acupuncture and certain supplements, such as magnesium, rhodiola, valerian, passionflower and theanine.
- Note: do not make changes to your medications without consulting your doctor.

Sleep

- Sleep is foundational to wellbeing, and it's your best protection against anxiety.
- Aim for 8 hours of sleep nightly.
- Stop caffeine by 12pm; decrease or eliminate overall caffeine consumption.
- Be strategic about light: bright light in the morning, dim light at night.
- Consider using orange-tinted glasses at night (Uvex brand on Amazon).
- Turn off electronics and wind down for 1 hour before bed.
- At night, consider brushing your teeth, bathing or reading a book by candlelight.

Exercise

- Studies have demonstrated that exercise is a very effective anti-anxiety treatment.
- Build small amounts of exercise into your day: walk to work, take a 20-minute walk after dinner, take the stairs, do 10 minutes of yoga, hold plank position for 1 minute, get a standing desk or treadmill desk.
- Yoga and Tai Qi are particularly beneficial for anxiety, but most important is to find something you enjoy.
- Aim to do *anything* for any amount of time every day.

Decrease Caffeine

- Caffeine exacerbates anxiety.
- If you drink coffee, tea or soda and you experience anxiety, strongly consider getting off caffeine.
- Do this gradually to mitigate caffeine withdrawal:
 - o Go from 2 coffees per day to 1; go from a large to a small
 - o Go from full caffeine to half-caf; go from half-caf to black tea
 - o Go from black tea to green tea
 - o Many people do well with 1 cup of green tea daily. If you still have anxiety, try herbal/decaf tea

Blood Sugar Stabilization

- *"It isn't disrespectful to the complexity of existence to point out that despair is, often, just low blood sugar and exhaustion."* – Alain de Botton
- Maintaining stable blood sugar will help relieve your anxiety.
- Notice if you anxious, panicky, shaky, lightheaded, cranky, irritable, quiet or tired when you haven't eaten in a while.
- Blood sugar often dips in the middle of the night, first thing in the morning, right before dinner, if you miss a meal, or if you recently ate a meal high in sugar or refined carbohydrates.
- Take steps to maintain stable blood sugar:
 - o Eat 3 meals and 2 snacks everyday; don't skip meals
 - o Eat protein & natural fat (coconut oil, olive oil, ghee & butter from pastured cows) at every meal
 - o Avoid sweets and refined carbohydrates
 - o Take a spoonful of coconut oil upon waking and before bed
 - o If you can't tolerate coconut oil, try MCT oil, which is flavorless (Bulletproof brand)
 - o Consider starting your day with butter tea (green or decaf tea blended with butter and MCT oil)
 - o Always have a snack handy (nuts, hard-boiled egg, dark chocolate, Epic™ jerky, almond butter)

Yoga, Meditation and Breathing Exercises

- Yoga and meditation are both evidence-based treatments for anxiety.
- Try 4-2-4 breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 2, exhale for 4.
- Do any amount of mindfulness meditation every day. This can simply be sitting and observing your thoughts with a compassionate, non-judgmental attitude.

Miscellaneous

- **Alcohol**
 - o The neurotransmitter *GABA* is our antidote to anxiety.
 - o Alcohol temporarily raises *GABA* levels (you feel relaxed), and then drops it lower.
 - o If you reduce your alcohol consumption, *GABA* can rebuild and anxiety gradually improves.
- **Medications**
 - o When safe and appropriate, and under close medical supervision, eliminate medications that contribute to anxiety (e.g., benzodiazepines, stimulants, Wellbutrin, steroids).
- **Acupuncture**
 - o There's a growing body of evidence supporting the use of acupuncture for anxiety.
 - o I recommend Seanna Sifflet at One Medical or Olo community acupuncture in Chelsea.

Book Recommendations:

1. ***Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*** by Jon Kabat-Zinn
2. ***Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*** by Thich Nhat Hanh
3. ***Reinventing Your Life: The Breakthrough Program to End Negative Behavior...and Feel Great Again*** by Jeffrey E. Young, PhD and Janet S. Klosko, PhD
4. ***Mastery of Your Anxiety and Worry: Workbook (Treatments that Work)*** by Michelle G. Crasky and David H. Barlowe

Supplementation

- Supplements can be helpful, but they're never a replacement for diet and lifestyle modifications.
- I recommend the following supplements *in addition* to everything else in this handout.

Morning

- **Fish oil** - *Green Pastures Blue Ice Royal Butter Oil Fermented Cod Liver Oil Cinnamon Tingle Flavor*
 - o I recommend the gel, but if you think you won't tolerate it, take capsules instead
- **Multivitamin** – *Pure Encapsulations Nutrient 950 with Vitamin K*
- **Turmeric** – *Source Naturals, Pure Encapsulations or New Chapter*
- **Probiotic** – *Prescript Assist*
- **Coconut Oil, MCT Oil or Brain Octane Oil** – *Bulletproof, Artisana, Dr. Bronners or Now Foods*

At Bedtime

- **Magnesium** – *Pure Encapsulations Magnesium Glycinate* 200-400mg at bedtime
- **Coconut Oil** – take a spoonful before bed

Discuss the following supplements with your doctor, and consider a trial under medical supervision:

- **Rhodiola Rosea** – *Pure Encapsulations or Swedish Herbal Institute Arctic Root* - not safe for bipolar
- **Integrative Therapeutics Lavela** during the day
- **Integrative Therapeutics Revitalizing Sleep Formula** at bedtime
- **Nature's Way Calm Aid**
- **Bach Rescue Remedy**
- **Gaia Herbs Serenity with Passionflower**
- **Valerian Root** – *Nature's Answer or Herb Pharm* – liquid – helpful for anxiety & insomnia