

overcoming anxiety so it doesn't overcome you

WRITTEN BY D. BURACK

Within reasonable limits, common anxiety is healthy and helpful. With correct channeling and monitoring, anxiety can motivate us to take action. It drives us to prepare for crucial meetings, study for difficult exams, and arrive on time for a job interview. Anxiety has developed a bad rap, but it's far from an indomitable force of evil. So why are we up in arms about it?



WHEN ANXIETY TAKES OVER

Normal anxiety, shaped by reasonable worries and fears, energizes us to cope with danger by releasing adrenaline and cortisol. Whether you're fleeing a lion in the jungle or rushing out the door in the morning, these hormones help you cope with stress. For some people though, anxiety grows into a mammoth beast that always blocks their way.

Do you constantly snap at everyone? Do you wake up countless times throughout the night? Do you combat pounding headaches every day, or unexplained feelings of nausea?

Signs of overwhelming anxiety include persistent irritability and worrying, insomnia, trouble concentrating, and an overriding sense of dread. Physical symptoms can also appear, such as heart palpitations, headaches, sweating, and stomach problems. When anxiety is ignored, people may retreat socially, and develop phobias or obsessive-compulsive behavior.

WORRY WON'T SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM

People who battle constant anxiety often rationalize that planning for worst-case scenarios leads them to the best solutions. There is a misconception that anxiety is constructive. In his book, "The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You", Robert L. Leahy, PhD, explains how this premise is false.

Leahy stresses that if you're always worried, the first step is to acknowledge that you have a problem. With this admission, you've won half the battle. So what's the second half?

Locate the root of your problems. If you're fretting over something you can change, then take control. But if your worries stem from something out of your control, then it's time to banish your anxiety. Worry .

Here's an overview of some of the anxiety treatments and remedies available.

MIND CONTROL

Thinking the worst? Banish the thought! Of course, simply telling yourself "Don't worry, be happy" only goes so far. It's impossible to instantly replace pessimism with bubbly cheer.

Thought control, formally known as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), refers to the process of exchanging anxious thoughts with productive, healthy ones. A type of talk therapy, CBT is regarded as one of the most successful methods of psychotherapy for generalized anxiety disorder.

In a nutshell, CBT encourages you to confront your dreadful thoughts head-on and examine all the details that frighten you. The next step is to retrain your brain to view these thoughts as theory and not fact. This new point of view is often enough to banish your anxiety.

CONVENTIONAL MEDICATION

Prescription medications, often used alongside psychotherapy, are very effective when taken responsibly. Depending upon the drug, some aim to cure the problem while others are preventive. Medications include antidepressants, beta-blockers, antihistamines, and specific anti-anxiety drugs. It is important to note that it frequently takes some trial and error before pinpointing the correct medication.

The potential downsides related to the medications include addiction and unpleasant side effects. Some drugs are therefore prescribed for the short-term or on an as-needed basis only.

If you sense that anxiety is taking over your life and you aren't finding success with any independent or alternative treatment efforts, don't hesitate to ask your physician about medication.

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture offers a quick, proven way to sap stress. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) states optimistically that acupuncture tends to reduce anxiety symptoms within the first few visits, versus other therapies that can take months to produce results.

Originating as a Chinese practice, very thin and short needles are inserted with minimal discomfort at specific body points in order to manipulate energy flow. Researchers from Georgetown University examined the unique effects of acupuncture and found that it curbs the body's production of stress hormones. The researchers' intriguing results were published in the *Journal of Endocrinology*, in April 2013.

DIET

The word diet alone is enough to provoke anxiety (sorry!). Yet the effects of nutrition on your mood can be noteworthy. Here are some guidelines to use in your quest for relaxation.

CARBOHYDRATES: Carb lovers take heart! Comforting carbs push up levels of serotonin, a brain chemical associated with calmness. Complex carbs take longer to digest and help stabilize blood sugar levels and are, therefore, your best choice. Think oatmeal, or a fresh whole-grain bread roll.

CUPPA TEA: In a research study, black tea drinkers had lower cortisol levels after a stressful situation than people who drank other liquids. According to the American Botanical Council, green tea contains the beneficial amino acid L-theanine, linked with suppressing high blood pressure and anxiety.

CRUNCHY AND CHEWY: Crunching carrots and celery sticks can blast away tension that's settled into a

clenched jaw. Chewing gum has a similar effect.

FATTY FISH: Naturally fatty fish, such as tuna and salmon, are packed with healthy Omega-3s, which help prevent stress hormones from spiking.

WARM MILK: Experts aren't sure if it's due to the enzyme tryptophan, the protein lactium, or the potassium content, but regardless, this is a respected, old-school way to ease into bedtime.

CITRUS FRUIT: Studies suggest that vitamin C can tame levels of adrenaline and cortisol while helping to normalize blood pressure after strenuous tasks.

GET ON THE MOVE!

There is indeed a solid bond between body and mind. Get your body in shape and you'll buff your brain too. According to the ADAA, a short, aerobic workout is enough to reap anti-anxiety benefits. Aerobic exercise jumpstarts the production of endorphins, which are nicknamed feel-good brain chemicals. Exercise can instantly shatter a heavy mood and put you on a path to open your mind and think more positively.

Any type of physical activity does the trick, as long as you get your heart pumping. Drew Ramsey, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at New York Presbyterian Hospital, and of Columbia University, blogs, "Twenty-one minutes: That's about how long it takes for exercise to reliably reduce anxiety... in any activity that gets heart rate up, anything you like." Go for a brisk walk, smile a lot, and watch others smile back at you!

NOW YOU ARE GETTING SLEEPY...

Do you see a swaying, vintage pocket watch when you think of hypnosis? In 2014, The British Psychological Society officially declared hypnosis to be a proven therapy for relieving stress and anxiety. Yet, the type of hypnosis referred to in this medical news report bears scant resemblance to the stage shows of yesteryear with hypnotized volunteers behaving in wacky ways.

Effective hypnosis eases a patient into a mental state where he or she is receptive to positive affirmations, as described in the book "Mindshift," by psychologist and hypnotherapist Marty Lerman, Ph.D. The hypnotherapist works to access the subconscious, where negative thoughts can be rejected in favor of beneficial suggestions. Lerman asserts that the patient enters a trance-like state similar to being mentally absorbed in any activity.

Be aware though that hypnosis doesn't always take hold, and only about three-fourths of human subjects can be hypnotized successfully.

NUTRITIONAL AND HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS

While every health food store claims to be jammed with stress-busting products, some supplements deserve more attention than others. Let's review a couple of herbal supplements that are noteworthy.

Valerian root is reputed to be a strong, calming sedative. It is frequently used as a sleep aid, so don't take it when you need to be alert.

Chamomile supplements contain *Matricaria recutita*, a compound that binds to the same brain receptors as drugs like Valium. A study at UPENN Medical Center found that patients with generalized anxiety disorder who took chamomile supplements for eight weeks, reported a reduction of anxiety symptoms.

While guzzling a cold beer won't dilute stress in the long term, extracts and tinctures of hops (*Humulus lupulus* flowers, used mainly in brewing beer) are recognized to contain a compound that has a bold, tranquilizing effect.

AROMATHERAPY

Our sense of smell is a pathway to the brain. With aromatherapy, the aromatic molecules of plant materials traverse the blood flowing through your brain, affecting moods and guiding the body into a more tranquil state.

The simplest way to practice aromatherapy is to add a few drops of a favorite essential oil into a diffuser. Popular mind-calming scents are lavender, geranium, rose, and jasmine oils.

NOT A BADGE OF HONOR

Chronic anxiety is not a badge of honor to be worn proudly. Our natural biology has a switch that automatically shuts down responses to stress when the risk is gone. It is unnatural and damaging to leave your anxiety mode open and running.

As anxiety weaves its way persistently through the entire body, it makes sense that many people find relief through a combination of holistic therapies. The specific treatment protocol doesn't matter as long as it helps. In past decades, seeking help for anxiety carried a stigma. Nowadays, knowing about the detrimental effects of chronic anxiety, the stigma should be attached to not seeking treatment. **fyi**

OUR NATURAL BIOLOGY HAS A SWITCH THAT AUTOMATICALLY SHUTS DOWN RESPONSES TO STRESS WHEN THE RISK IS GONE.



CHEAT SHEET: BEHAVIORS TO HELP CONTROL ANXIETY

Breathe. Inhale and exhale deeply and slowly.

Trust. Put your trust in Hashem and feel that there is a higher power from above that controls everything.

Declare recess. Step away from stress to clear your head. Do yoga or get a therapeutic massage.

Move around. Physical activity strengthens your body and your mind.

Listen to music. Hum a tune or listen to your favorite songs. Listening to music causes a biochemical reaction that decreases anxious feelings.

Laugh. Think thoughts that make you grin and chuckle. Laughter relieves stress instantly and increases blood flow, which decreases circulatory stress.

Eat and drink well. Reach for nutritious items, complex carbs, protein, and fresh veggies, to boost your energy and promote calm vibes. Green, black, and chamomile tea are also linked with reducing stress.

Get to bed early. Anxiety is tiring. Your body needs extra sleep in order to cope well under stress.

Light up. Aromatherapy candles with pleasant, calming scents are a great way to create a peaceful environment.

Draw a picture. Express yourself. Just doodle or sketch a portrait. Crafting artwork lowers stress.

Call a friend. Don't hold in or hide your anxiety. Speak to a friend or therapist to get your problems off your chest.