

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Alleviating Anxiety and Stress

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, over 40 million people are suffering from anxiety right now.

And you may be one of the many.

Some of these people are professionally diagnosed by medical experts, while others simply know that they shouldn't be worrying as much as they do or feeling as stressed as they are.

Everyone worries; it's in our nature, after all. Worry and anxiety are natural responses to frightening things in our lives. They're meant to warn us of danger and to respond to that danger as needed.

But when anxiety is interrupting your life and causing you to miss out on pleasurable activities, it's time to do more than simply wring your hands and hope the feelings pass.

For many people, they need more than to simply 'get over it.' They need guidance in relation to their thoughts and their behaviors, even medications and therapy at times.

Just because you need help for your anxiety doesn't mean that you're a weak person or someone that can not be cured.

Anxiety is a very treatable condition, though the treatments vary per case and per person.

You can learn to have a normal and minimally stressful life. And while you may never be completely stress-free, you will know how to handle stress when it does come your way.

Disclaimer: Any information in this book is not meant to substitute a doctor's medical advice or provide a diagnosis for anxiety. This is meant to be a source of information for you to consider. In order to receive a proper diagnosis, you should speak with your doctor.

In addition, if you are having feelings like you are going crazy or that you might want to take your own life, head straight to an emergency room.

1

DEFINING ANXIETY

When does everyday stress become anxiety? This is something many of us might wonder. Since we all have more responsibilities than we can handle at times, what separates our natural worries from anxiety?

To determine whether you might be suffering from anxiety as opposed to situational stress, here are clearer definitions of anxiety.

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

Just as the kinds of stress we experience differ from person to person, so do the symptoms that are associated with anxiety.

For example, you might suffer from physical symptoms like:

- Insomnia
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Heart racing
- Heart pounding
- Chest pains
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Pale skin
- Chills
- Hot flashes
- Shallow breathing
- Dizziness

Or you might experience mental and emotional symptoms like:

- Fear
- Nervousness
- Sadness
- Tendency toward distraction
- Problems with focus
- Inability to finish tasks
- Forgetfulness

- Problems sitting still

How you experience anxiety can vary as well on how anxious you are or what causes the initial feelings of anxiety.

For example, you might be anxious on your wedding day far more than you were in the planning stages of your wedding. Or you might be slightly nervous when you are studying, but very nervous when you are actually taking the test.

Anxiety responses are caused by physical and chemical reactions that are occurring in the body.

When you are threatened, your body produces a chemical called adrenaline. This chemical helps increase the functioning capacity of your body so that you can run away from the danger that you are facing.

And while this works just fine for animals, humans are a different case. You aren't necessarily in physical harm when this adrenaline is being pushed through your body, so it creates physical symptoms that can be uncomfortable.

As the adrenaline dissipates, your body goes back to a normal and calm state.

But when you have continued anxiety, your body is always producing more and more adrenaline, causing you to have long term affects from the anxiety response:

- High blood pressure
- Heart troubles
- Weight gain
- Acid reflux
- Ulcers
- Long term illnesses like cancer have been linked to high levels of stress

Even everyday aches and pains can be accentuated by the presence of anxiety. This makes sense because if your body is in overdrive more often than not, it's going to 'wear out' more quickly, causing you to have long term affects.

Since anxiety does have so many symptoms, it can be difficult to determine whether a patient is suffering from anxiety or from some other condition. This is why it's so important to visit a medical professional for a diagnosis.

DIAGNOSING ANXIETY

When you first think of anxiety, you probably think of a mental disorder, and that's partly true. But since the symptoms of anxiety are similar to other medical disorders, it's best to head to your general practitioner to rule out the physical possibilities for your anxiety.

You can schedule a regular check up and then let the doctor know that you have been experiencing more anxiety than usual lately.

Be prepared to answer questions like:

- How long have you been feeling anxious?
- What kinds of symptoms do you have?
- Is anxiety interfering with your life?
- Does anyone else in your family have anxiety issues?
- What is happening in your life right now?
- How have you tried to manage your stress in the past?
- What has worked for your anxiety?

If you want to be extra diligent, you may want to begin keeping a diary of the anxiety symptoms that you experience. Since you're the one that is feeling these symptoms on a daily or near daily basis, your observations are going to come in handy for your doctor who is only seeing you once in the office.

After you are asked these questions, you may be given a physical examination of your neck and throat, your blood pressure, and your weight. There are other tests that your doctor may decide to explore, depending on your responses to the questions they ask:

- Blood tests
- TSH, T4 – thyroid tests
- EKG
- Stress test
- X-rays
- CT scans
- MRI of the brain

Each of these tests will help the doctor uncover other potential cause of your anxiety. And while not every doctor will go through all of these tests, they are indicated for particular patients.

For example, if you have a family history of heart disease, you might be told to get an EKG and a stress test, but someone without that history may not need the tests.

If your primary care doctor believes you have anxiety, they may work with you to come up with a treatment plan, possibly medication and other lifestyle changes.

You might also choose to see a mental health professional for help with your symptoms.

CAUSES OF ANXIETY

Of course, if you knew the cause of your anxiety, it would be much easier to treat it, right?

Too often, there are multiple causes and risk factors for anxiety in your life. However, mental health professionals have narrowed the field to a few larger potential causes for the feelings you may be having:

- **Your brain chemistry**
Very often, the way your brain does (or does not) produce chemicals can cause you to feel more anxiety than someone else might. There are several schools of thought on this. Some believe that it's a problem of serotonin levels not being maintained, thus causing more depressive and fear-based reactions to stress. Others believe that it's merely an adrenaline imbalance causing the troubles with anxiety. Either way, there are ways to test and see if your brain chemistry is 'off.'
- **Genetics**
If someone else in your family has a history of anxiety, you are certainly at a greater risk of developing anxiety too. While there isn't a specific anxiety gene, the heredity link seems to be fairly consistent in case studies. Of course, the case could be made that those living in the same families may also simply have learned the same behaviors and reactions to stress.
- **Environment**
Where you grow up and how you are taught to handle stress often plays a big role in whether you too will have troubles managing your own anxiety. If you are taught that certain things are frightening, you

may believe that they are, even if they are not. Likewise, if you live in an area that isn't safe, you might have higher levels of anxiety.

- **Past negative experiences**
Sexual traumas, military service, rapes, incest and other painful experiences can also lead to problems with anxiety later in life. Even if you feel that you have dealt with these issues or that you can 'get over it,' you may still have troubles feeling comfortable in similar situations.
- **Illness**
Whether you are sick or a loved one is sick, anxiety levels can rise exponentially during this sort of crisis time.
- **Deaths**
The death of a loved one is another common cause of anxiety.

Of course, this list could be pages long in terms of what causes us to be stressed out.

Common everyday causes of anxiety include:

- Family
- Relationships
- Work
- Children
- Money
- Etc.

Narrowing down the cause for you might take time, but when you are able to determine the trigger for your anxiety response, you will be better able to respond to it in a positive manner.

Plus, you will be able to avoid the situations where you feel the most anxiety or you can learn to react in a different manner to them.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS WITH ANXIETY-LIKE SYMPTOMS

When your body is in a heightened state of reaction, you might want to remember that stress isn't the only thing that can cause this to happen.

Your body is telling you that something isn't right and that you need to do something about it. This is a natural reaction of your body and it's why many medical conditions can have symptoms similar to anxiety.

Your body is working extra hard to stay in balance, but instead of ignoring the symptoms, you may want to get medical attention.

Some potential medical conditions include:

- **Heart attacks**
If you begin to feel very anxious with sweating and chest pains, you need to go to an emergency room immediately. Sometimes, you will simply feel a sense of doom wash over you when your body is having troubles – don't ignore this feeling.
- **Pulmonary embolism**
When your lungs are having troubles getting oxygen because of a clot, you might feel as though you are filled with dread. Couple that with chest pains and troubles breathing or back pain and you might have more than just a stress response.
- **Low blood sugar**
Your body requires sugar in order to make energy for the cells of every organ and nerve. When you don't have enough sugar in your body, you can become lightheaded and begin to sweating and have heart palpitations. Your body is trying to tell you to eat something.
- **Hypothyroidism**
When your body isn't producing enough thyroid hormones, you can have troubles with anxiety symptoms. You might feel sluggish and stressed, causing you to blame it on your job or your life, rather than your thyroid. This is especially common in older patients. But it can be treated with synthetic hormone supplements.
- **Infections**
You might also be suffering from an infection when you are experiencing anxiety symptoms. These are generally easy to treat, but if your anxiety is accompanied by other symptoms, be certain to tell your doctor.
- **Menopause**
Some women report severe anxiety when they are entering menopause. While this is completely normal, it can be upsetting if you're not used to feeling this way.
- **Hypertension**
Having too high a blood pressure can also make some people feel

lightheaded and disoriented. But low blood pressure can do this too. It's always a good idea to have your blood pressure checked yearly.

When in doubt, persistent anxiety is something that should be checked out by a medical professional.

Most of the time, it's nothing serious, but on the off chance that it might be more than just a stressful moment, you want to double check – one less thing to worry about.

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CATEGORIES OF ANXIETY

While anxiety seems to be one thing, it's actually quite simple to break up anxiety into a number of other categories.

When you can be specific about the kind of anxiety you have, you will begin to better understand your path to health and to serenity again.

TYPES OF ANXIETY

If you were to open up the DSM-IV, you would find a very large section on anxiety and anxiety related conditions. And while this might be helpful to a medical professional, you don't need to take your self-diagnosis that far.

What you do need to do is have some idea of what your anxiety might be categorized as.

This will help you have a starting point for your doctor and it will help you feel better about having some sort of category into which you fit.

There are several different categories that are common:

- Panic disorders
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Depressive disorders
- Social anxiety
- Obsessive compulsive disorders

Even if you don't fit perfectly into one of these categories, you will begin to figure out what might be going on in your head – and how to start getting help.

PANIC DISORDERS

Over two million people are thought to have panic and panic related anxiety disorders.

Just as the name implies, this is a disorder in which the person feels panicked about their life. These situations can come on suddenly or they can happen during most times of the day.

A panic disorder is characterized by:

- Panic attacks
- Pervasive feelings of panic and dread
- Fear of future panic attacks
- Avoidance of situations in which the panic occurred

The episodes of panic can happen without any warning, causing a bit of a cycle for the patient. Since the panic attacks can be frightening, they become anxious that they will have another – often causing them to have a higher incidence of a repeat attack.

This is the kind of anxiety that overtakes a person, causing them to sweat, have chest pains, and feel like they are disconnected from their body. They might feel dizzy and their heart may begin to race. Often, these attacks are mistaken for heart attacks due to their severity.

What is happening is that the body is overproducing adrenaline, causing the body to become 'hyped up.' You might become afraid that you will lose control or that something bad will happen, even if you are in a safe place with no obvious danger.

There may be a trigger for the attack and there may not be a trigger, depending on the person.

The good news is that adrenaline moves through the body fairly quickly, allowing the panic attack to subside after a few minutes. But while the attacks may be short, they can continue to repeat themselves over a course of many hours.

Some patients find that they can not function normally because of these attacks. Because they are so worried about being in a social situation where they might experience a panic attack, they can begin to cut themselves off from the world, leading to more worry and more panic.

There are many treatments for panic attacks: medications, therapy, and natural therapies.

While you might never completely get rid of panic, you can learn techniques that will help you manage the panic attacks and make them less frightening.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDERS

Worry and stress are in place for a reason – to let us know that we need to be careful or that we might be putting ourselves in danger. But when you feel anxious on more days than you feel calm, you might be suffering from generalized anxiety disorder.

The main symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder include:

- Feeling overly energetic
- Problems with concentrating
- Tension in the muscles
- Insomnia
- Impatience with others
- Headache
- Tightness in the throat
- Stomachaches
- Diarrhea

Unlike the panic attack, you don't have sharp times of anxiety, but rather you feel anxious all of the time.

Even if you finish up all of your work and you have every chore done, you might still feel restless and like you can not relax. Your anxiety might be very high on days when you have things to be worried about, but it doesn't go away on other days.

The main concern with generalized anxiety disorder is that it can lead to other problems – substance abuse, problems holding a job, teeth grinding, etc. Because you're feeling anxious most of the time, you might try to find ways to help relieve your stress.

And not always in a healthy way.

Generalized anxiety disorder can be treated with a combination of tools: therapy, medications, and lifestyle changes are the best combination, with most patients requiring a little medical intervention to help through the rougher parts of the anxiety.

DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS

When most people think of anxiety, the last thing they think of is depression – or is it?

If you've ever been under a lot of pressure at work, you may have found yourself beginning to go into a more negative mindset:

- I'll never get this done.
- I can't do anything right.
- I'm probably going to get fired.
- I'm a worthless employee.

When you begin to attack yourself for things that are happening around you, causing you to feel sad and less of a person, it may be the first sign of a depressive disorder.

There are many more subcategories of depressive disorders that you may hear in the treatment process:

- **Bipolar disorder**
This is a chemical imbalance in the brain that causes the patient to move back and forth between being very depressed to being very happy or manic. However, the swinging back and forth can cause the patient to have troubles functioning in everyday life. The very manic phases can cause problems with making rational decisions while the low points can cause suicidal tendencies.
- **Major depression**
This is the most severe of the depressive disorders. It is generally a focused period of depression in which the person has intense feelings of sadness and hopelessness, often leading to suicide attempts.
- **Dysthymia**
A lesser form of depression, dysthymia is a general state of being depressed and not being able to function as a 'normal' person would. It can last for a long period of time.

Various symptoms of depressive disorders include:

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Negative thinking
- Guilt
- Feeling worthless and helpless
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Insomnia or problems with sleeping too much
- Appetite changes
- Problems with making decisions

- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Thoughts of death
- Difficulties with concentration
- Physical symptoms that do not get better with medical intervention

Just as with the other anxiety disorders, these symptoms will vary from person to person.

Depressive disorders can be caused by a specific event trigger or they can be lifelong concerns. Treatment is possible, but often medications need to be adjusted frequently in order to get the right levels of chemicals in the brain.

In major depressive episodes, the patient may need to be hospitalized.

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Something that's getting more attention in the press lately is social anxiety.

If you find that you have troubles in social settings, giving a speech, or just talking with other people, you might be suffering from social anxiety.

This is a very common form of anxiety and since it is based upon your environment, it is often simple to treat and to manage. Though a combination of medication and behavioral therapy, you can go into social situations feeling calm and comfortable.

There are a number of symptoms you may experience in relation to social anxiety:

- Trembling
- Fidgeting
- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Heart pounding
- Panic attacks
- Nervousness
- Problems concentrating
- Stammering

When these symptoms begin to interfere with your ability to form relationships with others, you might want to consider talking to your doctor about treatments.

Though you might suffer from some nervousness about giving a speech (who doesn't?), it's when you refuse to give that speech that you need to get treatment.

The good news is that social anxiety treatment plans are usually brief and have long term success for most patients.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE BEHAVIORS

When you think of OCD or obsessive compulsive disorder, you probably don't immediately think of anxiety.

Your first image is probably a person who washes their hands over and over and over.

But they're performing these repetitive behaviors because they feel anxious about going through their life without these behaviors.

A person with OCD will have troubles with obsessions and compulsions.

Obsessions are:

- Persistent and recurrent thoughts that take over the mind of the patient
- Recurrent impulses that cause anxiety and stress
- The thoughts the person has are not just higher levels of stress

The patient will try to control their own thoughts, only to realize that there are certain parts of their obsessions that they can not control, causing a cycle of anxiety and worry that the person can not stop – even if they want to stop it.

Compulsions are:

- Repetitive actions that the patient does in order to feel more in control of their life and their anxiety
- The actions aren't generally actually helping to relieve the anxiety in a positive or practical way

Those with obsessive compulsion disorder live in a generalized state of panic about things that could happen to them. So they build a system of behaviors that help to distract them from these worries.

However, in the repetition of their reactions, the patient begins to feel like they need to continue doing certain things in order to prevent bad things from happening.

This is a fairly rare disorder and it can be passed down through a family. If you have someone in your family with the OCD behaviors, you might want to talk to your doctor about when you need to consider treatments.

Many of us will have smaller things we do that help us feel in control – like checking the stove or the coffee pot before we leave. So long as these behaviors aren't taking up a large portion of our lives or getting in the way of our job or our relationships, they're not considered unhealthy.

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THERAPY

At some point in thinking about your own anxiety or in talking to your primary care doctor, the idea of therapy may have come up. Some people will immediately dismiss therapy as being useless, but when you think about it, anxiety is often a set of behaviors that are interfering with our lives. In order to learn how to control these behaviors and reactions, we need someone to teach us the proper ways to react – that's all a therapist will do.

DO YOU NEED THERAPY?

The first question you want to ask yourself is, "How bad is it?" While this sounds a bit rhetorical, if you feel like you simply can not live another day feeling the anxiety that you feel, it may be time for you to consider therapy options.

Here are some signs that you need outside help:

- You aren't feeling any better
- You are having troubles keeping up with responsibilities
- You are avoiding activities
- You are feeling hopeless

For most people, going to even a few therapy appointments can help them at least get an idea of what's going on in their head. This can help them feel less out of control and begin the healing process for them personally.

On the other hand, therapy isn't something that will work for everyone.

Just like the idea of going to school, you need to work hard in order to get results. Therapy is not just a situation in which you will absorb the knowledge of the therapist.

You will need to take time to look at the way you think and the way you respond to stress in your life. If this is something you are not ready to do, therapy may not be the best option right now.

You may also find that therapy is something that you only need at certain points of your life instead of all the time. For example, when you are going through a difficult time at work or in your relationship, you might want to attend regular sessions.

If you are ready to start making lifelong changes, a therapist can help you begin the journey in the right direction.

TYPES OF THERAPY FOR ANXIETY

Depending on the type of anxiety you have, there are different types of therapy that will work better for you.

Here are some of the most common anxiety therapy practices:

- **Cognitive**
In this type of therapy, you will work on learning about your thinking patterns and how they are affecting your behaviors. By taking a close look at the way that you think, you can learn to change your destructive thinking patterns and begin to take control of your life.
- **Behavioral**
A therapist will teach the patient how to regain control over behaviors that they do not want in their lives. For example, if you have feelings of worry, you will learn how to respond to these in a positive manner that does not induce anxiety.
- **CBT or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**
A combination of cognitive and behavioral therapy, this is one of the most popular anxiety treatments. In this therapy, you will do homework and really work deeply in relation to the way you think and how this is affecting your life.
- **Immersion**
By placing you into the situation that makes you anxious, you will learn how to respond in a more peaceful way. With the guidance of the therapist, you will safely experience the frightful situation and begin to look at it from a positive angle.
- **Stress Reduction/Relaxation**
Often, an anxious person just needs to learn how to keep themselves calm. By learning stress reduction or relaxation techniques on your own or with a therapist, you can begin to take control of your worry.

You may find that one or a combination of therapies will work best for you.

Traditional psychotherapy is also recommended for anxiety when you want to get to the root of the 'why' of the feelings, but in the case of these behavioral therapies, these kinds are more concerned with real life lessons that can help you live a fuller and easier life.

Sometimes, learning to change your behavior is the best first step. It can build confidence and help you stay on track.

CHOOSING PSYCHOLOGISTS

Like any other medical professional, you need to spend some time looking at the various psychologists that are available to you.

First of all, there are several categories of therapists available:

- **Therapists**
These professionals have graduate training and a license to practice therapy. Their specialties can vary as can their techniques.
- **Psychologists**
These therapists can have multiple techniques at their disposal as well as different ideas about where anxiety comes from.
- **Psychiatrists**
These are medical doctors who are allowed to prescribe medications. If you feel that medication may be necessary for you, you might want to consider this kind of therapist, though you can also get psychiatric medications from your primary care doctor.

In order to choose the right therapist for you, there are several questions you should ask yourself:

- What are my goals?
- What are my main concerns?
- How much time can I commit?

You need to be clear about what you will want from your therapist experience in order to find the right therapist for your particular case.

If you can, try to get referrals to therapists from your doctor or from friends and family. This will give you a better sense of the types of therapists they are and how they might be able to help you.

When you don't have this option, you might want to call your health insurance company to get a list of the local in plan therapists in your area.

Call around to ask if the therapist specializes in dealing with anxiety disorders. If they do, you will want to ask what kinds of therapies they utilize.

Some therapists will utilize a number of different techniques: art therapy, play therapy, music, etc.

You might need to switch therapists a few times in the beginning, but this is okay. Your current therapist may be able to refer you to someone who would be a better fit.

HOW TO MAKE THERAPY WORK FOR YOU

Something that you need to understand about therapy is that you are the main participant in this process.

You are the one that will need to make changes and be active in the tasks you are asked to do in order to get the most of the process. If you do not follow the guidance of your therapist, the process to an anxiety free life might be longer than you'd like.

Here are a few tips to help you make the most of therapy:

- Go as many times a week as recommended
- Do your homework as instructed
- Have ideas in mind for each appointment
- Keep a journal of your visits to track your progress
- Talk
- Ask questions of your therapist
- Follow your medication schedule
- Change therapists if you feel that you can't be honest

Being honest is the biggest part of your work in therapy. If you can't be honest with your therapist; they may not be able to diagnose you correctly, which can lead to troubles and a less than effective treatment schedule.

In therapy, you will need to be up front about any troubles you are having or any mistakes you have made along the way. From those mistakes, you can learn more and grow healthier.

When you are willing to participate in the therapy process, you will begin to see changes happen in your life much more quickly than you thought possible.

But therapy is work.

And you need to be willing to do the work that is asked of you when it is asked of you.

HOW LONG WILL YOU NEED THERAPY?

The easy answer to this question is that you will need to be in therapy until you feel like you can function well enough on your own.

So, as soon as you feel like you don't need it anymore, you should be done.

But this isn't always a clear cut decision to make. Often, the therapist will come up with a tentative plan for the overall length of the therapy. For example, some forms of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy run for sixteen sessions.

At the end of this time, the improvement of the patient is evaluated and then new timelines are made or the patient is able to leave the therapy setting.

What you will want to do is come up with a list of goals between you and your therapist that you are working toward. When you have begun to check these items off and you feel confident that you can handle stressful situations, you might want to bring up the idea of discontinuing active treatment.

At that point, you will probably work on ways to handle certain situations as you reenter your normal life.

For most patients, therapy will begin to show benefits between eight and ten weeks, but for others it can be shorter or longer.

For anxiety, it's thought that treatment should be about three months to six months, depending on the severity and the goals. You, however, may need a longer time before you feel confident.

4

MEDICATIONS

The big debate in anxiety treatment is whether the use of medications is a good idea. On one hand, they can help patients relax and help them feel better about their worries, but on the other hand, some believe that medications are only a bandage for the real troubles – this side believes medications don't solve anything.

No matter what you might believe, there's little doubt that medications are a large part of the treatment of anxiety.

DO YOU NEED MEDICATIONS?

It's trickier to say one way or the other if you need medications to help with your anxiety.

For many primary care doctors, they will look at the symptoms you are having and see what self care measures you are taking on your own. If you have tried cutting down your workload and meditating more often without any relief, they might recommend you try medication.

Some patients actually need to be medicated because their lives have become unmanageable because of their anxiety.

In the case of OCD, for example, the repetitive behaviors they do can take up hours of each day, while medications can help to reduce the obsessive need to be compulsive.

Again, the question becomes: how bad is it? How bad is your anxiety?

If you feel that you can not overcome the anxiety on your own and you're not ready for therapy, medication can be a great way to start the healing process. By allowing your mind and your body to relax, you can begin to see that there is hope and that you can feel better.

You will want to keep in mind the following things when choosing to take medications:

- **You will need to take the medications daily on a strict schedule**
If you're not good at remembering to take pills, you might want to talk to your doctor about alternatives.
- **These medications can interact with other medications**
When you are taking other medications on a daily basis, even over the counter medications and herbal supplements, be sure to let your doctor and your pharmacist know.
- **You might have a period in which you feel worse**
There can be a beginning phase in which your anxiety can get worse. This is temporary, but it's something to keep in mind.
- **These medications take time to work**
When you are taking an everyday medication, you might need to wait for several weeks before you begin to see results.
- **You might need to switch medications to find the right one**
There are many medications available, but everyone's body is different. You might need to keep trying different ones until you find the right fit for you.
- **You might experience unpleasant side effects**
Just as with any medication, you might have side effects when you first begin.

Medications are serious business, so you need to make sure you can make the commitment to taking them on a regular basis, as recommended by your doctor.

KINDS OF MEDICATIONS

With all of the different kinds of anxiety that are listed by mental health professionals, it's no wonder that there are just as many medications available to help in the treatment.

Most of the medications have multiple purposes for them beyond anxiety, so you may be able to help multiple concerns at once.

SSRIs – Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors

Since it's thought that the concentration of serotonin in the bloodstream affects the amount of anxiety that you might feel, these medications work to help manage your serotonin levels and keep them in the 'calm' levels.

What happens is that these medications keep the serotonin from being taken back into the body, helping keep more of it in the bloodstream, which is thought to elevate mood and keep you from feeling panicked.

Brand Names: Paxil, Celexa, Lexapro, Luvox, Prozac, Zoloft

Generic Names: Paroxetine, Citalopram, Escitalopram, Fluvoxamine, Fluoxetine, Sertaline

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Panic Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- OCD

Potential Side Effects: Loss of Appetite, Weight Loss/Gain, Headaches, Nausea

These medications need to be taken on a daily basis in order to maintain their efficacy. You will need to take these pills at the same time each day, generally in the morning.

The biggest concern for many patients is that SSRIs are linked with weight gain more than weight loss. While this is minimal in most patients, it can be quite a lot in others.

If you are concerned about potential weight gain, you might want to talk with your doctor about other medications that might have a lower possibility of this happening.

You can also begin to watch your diet and exercise levels before starting these medications to see if weight gain is associated with your medication or with the way you are eating or exercising.

MAOIs – Monomine Oxidase Inhibitors

Much like the SSRIs, the MAOIs help to regulate the production of serotonin in the brain, but they also help to monitor the levels of norepinephrine. This helps to provide steadier moods and more balanced emotions.

Some people will also use MAOIs for depression as it helps to keep moods from getting too low.

Brand Names: Parnate, Nardil, Marplan

Generic Names: Tranylcypromine, Phenelzine, Isocarboxid

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Panic Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder

Potential Side Effects: dry mouth, dizziness, lightheadedness, lower blood pressure, constipation, sexual troubles

MAOIs are a very powerful class of medications and thus they are not recommended as often as other prescriptions.

The main concern with these medications is that they have many interaction troubles that can cause harmful side effects. Some foods contain chemicals that can cause problems with the function of the medication, leading to physical ailments.

When an MAOI is taken with an SSRI, it can cause serotonin syndrome, which can be deadly if the levels of serotonin are too high and are not brought down by medical intervention.

The other concern with MAOIs is that they can rarely be combined with any kind of medication, which is very limiting to some patients.

Tricyclic Antidepressants – TCAs

As the name suggests, tricyclic antidepressants have a chemical structure that causes them to work on a cycle.

These medications are some of the oldest on the market, first introduced in the 1980s to help with anxiety and other mental conditions. Their long term safety is fairly established, but they still present problems for some patients and their goals in therapy.

These medications work by helping to balance the concentration of serotonin and norepinephrine in the body, just like MAOIs do. But these prescriptions will also work to help with dopamine, which can actually cause more side effects.

Because of all the interactions and blocking of cell receptors, some patients can have severe side effects that will hinder their ability to continue taking the medication at all.

Brand Names: Adapin, Elavil, Norpramin, Sinequan, Surmontil, Tofranil

Generic Names: Doxepin, Amitriptyline, Desipramine, Doxepin, Trimipramine, Imipramine

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Panic Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- OCD

Potential Side Effects: dry mouth, blurry vision, constipation, drowsiness, sexual function upset, low blood pressure, weight gain, nausea, weakness, headache

One of the many concerns with this medication is its ability to affect blood sugar. This can be problematic in those patients who also suffer from diabetes. If you have diabetes, you will need to monitor your blood sugar carefully, as TCAs can lower it significantly.

Another concern with TCAs is the increased suicidal thoughts among some users. This is often something that happens only in the beginning weeks of treatment, but it can continue for some people who are taking the medication.

Antidepressants

As one of the most commonly known groups of mental health medications, antidepressants are often thought to be the cure all medications for those who are having troubles with their thinking or behavior.

But this is certainly not the case.

As with all of these medications, changing the brain chemistry is a tricky process and one that can cause a number of uncomfortable side effects for some patients.

Antidepressants are generally geared toward depression and patients who have feelings of sadness and despair on more days than not. But for those who suffer from anxiety, they can help to level off moods and make times of

stress seem more manageable – especially when they are feeling anxiety in relation to the sadness.

Many of these medications can also be called SNRIs (Effexor and Cymbalta) or Serotonin Noepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors as well as NASSAs (Remeron) Noradrenergic and Specific Serotonergic Antidepressants.

There are many more possibilities in this category that you can discuss with your doctor and therapist.

Brand Names: Effexor, Cymbalta, Remeron

Generic Names: Venlafaxine, Duloxetine, Mirtazapine

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Panic Disorders
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- OCD
- Social Anxiety Disorder

Potential Side Effects: dry mouth, constipation, sleepiness, weight gain, nausea, stomach pain, sexual troubles, anxiety, diarrhea

Because these are newer medications, they often will have fewer side effects as other medications because they are more targeted to the probably receptors that are involved in producing the anxiety.

Benzodiazepines

When you are going to be entering a stressful situation, and you know that you are, it might be helpful to have something to take to help you remain calm.

That's what benzodiazepines are for.

In fact, most people have heard about and have probably taken one of these medications at some point in their life. By helping to sedate the patient, they can help you manage a particularly stressful situation – airplane rides, dentist visits, etc.

But these medications are short acting and they are also highly addictive. You will begin to feel a sense of calm within thirty to sixty minutes, however, these effects will not last a full day.

Considered to be mild tranquilizers, they are often given to patients before surgery as well as given to those who are in a lot of muscular pain.

The more of these drugs you take, the more you may need to take in the future as your body can build up a tolerance to these medications.

Brand Names: Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Librium

Generic Names: Diazepam, Alprazolam, Lorazepam, Clonazepam, Chlordiazepoxide

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Panic Disorders
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder

Potential Side Effects: drowsiness, memory loss, dizziness, disorientation

It should be noted that these medications are not used for long term therapy as they become less and less effective. But for those who need medication for only certain situations, these are certainly effective.

Beta Blockers

While most people don't think of heart medication for anxiety, it's surprising how many people do use beta blockers for their anxiety disorders.

By helping to suppress the physical symptoms of anxiety – like a rapid heart rate or pounding heart - the patient feels better and can function normally without any ill effects or any disruption of their everyday activities.

Some people will actually take beta blockers before stressful situations like speeches to help them maintain their composure.

Brand Names: Inderal, Tenormin

Generic Names: Propranolol, Atenolol

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorders (to a certain extent)

Potential Side Effects: stomach pain, dizziness, fatigue, insomnia, heart rate changes

Whenever you are taking a medication that is meant for the heart, you should expect to see significant change in your heart rate and your blood pressure.

This is why it's important to follow up with your physician on a regular basis to be certain that these changes are normal.

Antihistamines

Most people wouldn't think of antihistamines as something that might help anxiety, but these medications help to block histamine receptors in the brain, allowing some patients to feel relief from their anxiety.

Of course, not all antihistamines are created alike, so it's not a good idea to simply start taking cold medications that you might find in your local pharmacy or grocery store.

Brand Names: Atarax/Vistaril

Generic Names: Hydroxyzine

For These Anxiety Issues:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Potential Side Effects: dry mouth, dizziness, constipation, headache, stomach pain

If you are looking to quell some moderate anxiety, you may want to ask your doctor if an antihistamine might be a good place for you to begin.

Other Medications

Each year, more medications become available for anxiety and anxiety related disorders.

This is good news for those already taking medications as they will always have new medications to try should their current medication stop working as well.

On the other hand, for those new to their anxiety diagnosis, this is also good news because it means you are more likely to find something that will work for you the first time, rather than having to go through many more medications before finding the right fit.

Other potential categories of anxiety medications include:

- Anticonvulsants
- Atypical anti-psychotics

What you need to realize is that many medications will lose their effectiveness after a certain time period. You may choose to increase the dosage to see if that helps, or you may simply want to try another medication to see if that will work better.

Don't become discouraged if you need to switch medications a few times. This is completely normal and is to be expected in most cases.

THE PROBLEMS OF ADDICTION

Just as with any medication that changes your brain chemistry, there can be troubles with addiction in certain cases.

When you receive your initial prescription, you should find out whether there is a likelihood of addiction and take steps to make sure you are using the medication appropriately.

You can begin this process by only taking the medication as you are prescribed. If the instructions say that you should only take it once a day, then you should only take the medication once a day.

If you notice that you need more of the short acting medications (like benzodiazepines) than you usually do, you might want to call your doctor's office to see if you can get in for an appointment. These are very easy to get addicted to, so you will want to get something else that is less addictive or consider a completely different medication.

Here are some signs that you may be addicted:

- You need more than the recommended dose
- You are counting down the hours until your next dose
- You need more refills than you have been given
- You feel physically sick when you aren't taking the medication
- You think you might have a problem

There are many different medications, so you might simply need to change to something else. Your doctor will be able to help you detox from your current medication in order to reduce the side effects.

WHEN TO CHANGE MEDICATION

There may come a point in your treatment when you might need to change your medications. This is a fairly common occurrence, so don't feel like it's your fault that the medication isn't working anymore.

Here are some signs that your medication may need a change:

- You are suffering from side effects that are interfering with your life
- Your anxiety is still high
- Your anxiety levels have returned to previous levels
- You are at the highest dose without any affect

It is common for anxiety patients to switch medications a few times throughout the course of their treatment.

Your body can become 'used' to the medications, making it difficult for you to attain the same feelings that you had when you first started taking the medication.

What you will want to keep in mind is that you will need to wait a certain amount of time before you will see any effects from the medication at all. Usually about two to eight weeks is standard for seeing an improvement with medication.

Your body needs to build up a 'store' of the medication in your bloodstream before you can get the full benefit. So, don't give up right away on your medication if it doesn't seem to be working.

You might also need to change medication when you are pregnant or want to become pregnant.

Some medications can be transferred to the fetus, which is not a good thing. Check with your doctor and with your pharmacist to make sure that you aren't taking anything that might be harmful to your baby.

In the case of getting pregnant, you might want to wait a few months after coming off the medication before you begin trying to conceive. This will give your body plenty of time to clean out the medicines.

HOW LONG WILL YOU NEED MEDICATION?

Just as with therapy, the length of your medication treatment depends on the severity of your anxiety as well as your confidence in your progress.

You should ask yourself:

- Do I feel better?
- Have my symptoms improved?
- Have I made changes to my life to support my medication?

If you can answer these questions in the affirmative, you might be heading toward the road of getting off of your medication.

The first thing you should know is that some people need to be on one medication or another for the rest of their lives. It's not a common thing, but it does seem to be the case for some people.

For others, anxiety medications are a short term aide to help as they are starting therapy or experiencing a particularly stressful time.

The general suggestion for medications is to be on them for no less than three months. This will give the medication plenty of time to work and to allow you some time to investigate therapy options.

In many studies, those who combined therapy with medication often found that they could go off the medication more quickly. These studies also found that the combination of drug and behavioral therapy helped the patient reduce their anxiety symptoms much more rapidly than one treatment or the other.

If you feel that you would like to stop your medication, be certain to talk this over with your doctor as well as with your therapist. Some medications require that you be weaned off of them, so you will want to devise a plan of slowly taking your body away from the drugs.

Some medications can also be used whenever you have severe bouts of anxiety and only in certain situations. If you want to have something like this on hand, talk to your doctor about the possibility.

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ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

Everyone is talking about natural and alternative medicine, so it's no wonder people with anxiety are wondering if there is something for them too.

And the good news is that there is. Or rather, there are many alternative therapies that can help you with your anxiety.

HERBAL MEDICATIONS

Though the pharmaceutical business is booming with anxiety medications, this does not mean that you need to start with those medications in order to feel less anxiety.

Many studies are showing that some herbal supplement may be just as effective as the modern day medicines, though with fewer side effects.

Some of the herbal medications include:

- **Saint John's Wort**
This is a herbal that acts as a mood stabilizer as well as an antidepressant. For those with generalized anxiety disorder, this is taken every day to help balance your stress levels and help you manage your feelings more effectively. This needs to be taken for at least a month before you will begin to see improvement.
- **Valerian**
A soothing herb, this can be taken at bedtime or at any time of the day when you are beginning to feel a little anxious.
- **Passionflower**
Another natural supplement that is thought to act much as benzodiazepines.
- **Kava**
This herbal supplement has had some controversy, but it does seem to help those with mild anxiety issues. Taken in a tea or in pill form, it can help soothe frazzled nerves.

- **Chamomile**
There's a reason why chamomile tea is used before bed. It helps to soothe your stress and can help you manage your anxiety.

As with any medication, you need to check with your doctor before taking any of these herbs – especially if you are on medication for other medical conditions.

Herbal supplements can and will react with some medications, rendering them ineffective and potentially life threatening.

CHINESE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

If you're not already family with Chinese Traditional Medicine, you might want to take a closer look.

This medical practice system has been used for thousands of years, and is based on the idea that your body is filled with energy. When the energy flows well, you are healthy both physically and emotionally.

But when the energy is stifled in some way, you will become unhealthy. So, anxiety is thought to be caused by an energy disruption in your body. By using one or more techniques in Chinese Traditional Medicine, you can begin to feel calmer.

There are several different practices within this medicine system:

- **Acupuncture**
Most people have heard of acupuncture. This is the practice of putting tiny needles into the skin at certain points. Since the belief is that the body contains many pathways for energy, by introducing these needles, the practitioner will help to make the flow of energy right again. This kind of practice can take multiple sessions and those who receive acupuncture report feeling lighter and calmer after even the first session. The needles not only help to regulate the energy, but they can also simulate the body's production of 'feel good' endorphins.
- **Herbal supplements**
By going to a Chinese herbalist, you will learn about how your body works. Since all of our bodies are different, these practitioners will ask you a number of questions about your life and your habits in order to get a broad picture of what might be causing your energy imbalances. Then, they will recommend certain herbs or mixtures to take in a tea

form or in a pill form. Some of these herbs can include: ginseng, licorice root, and many others.

- **Acupressure**

Similar to acupuncture, this practice helps to stimulate the various energy meridians in the body without the use of needles. By pressing certain points, the energy flow is corrected.

You might also encounter other forms of Chinese Traditional Medicine as you search for anxiety relief. But these tend to be the most often recommended for their effectiveness and their safety.

It should be pointed out that some Chinese herbs can conflict with traditional anxiety medications, so if you are taking any other medications, you will want to tell the practitioner about it as well as ask your pharmacist which herbs should be avoided.

TAI CHI AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

For some people, taking supplements isn't enough or they find that energy work is simply not something they believe will work – and of course, they find that it doesn't work.

There are many other alternative therapies that can help reduce your anxiety by promoting relaxation and mind-body awareness. These practices can be done on your own or in the company of others.

- **Tai Chi**

This ancient practice can help you restore the balanced energy to your body through a series of slow movements. Though it was started as a gentle sort of self defense, this practice has become common place not only for anxiety patients, but also for those suffering from joint and muscle pain. You can find a number of Tai Chi instructional videos and tapes in bookstores and online, but you might want to try taking classes with a certified teacher first.

- **Yoga**

While it seems that yoga can help with nearly any complaint you have, there's a good reason for these claims. By helping you focus your attention on how your body feels, you begin to distract yourself from the anxiety and stress you are feeling. At the same time, you are removing the actual muscle tension you have in your body, helping you feel more relaxed. By practicing a few simple yoga moves each day, you can begin to increase your mind-body awareness and allow yourself to remain calm even in the most stressful of situations.

- **Massage**
Just as with yoga, relieving muscular tension can often help you feel less stressed and anxious. By getting regular massages, you can limit the amount of muscular tension you feel as well as help to release natural endorphins into your blood stream, which can help you feel lighter and calmer.
- **Breathing techniques**
One of the easiest ways to begin to reduce your overall anxiety is to learn how to breathe correctly. Too often, when we are stressed, we take shallow breaths, which can lead to troubles with getting enough oxygen into our bloodstream. By stopping to take a few deep breaths each day, you can begin to calm your body and help you focus your attention away from whatever is causing you stress.
- **Meditation**
Many people would much rather do acupuncture than try meditation, but this might not be the best decision. Meditation is another age old practice that can help anyone feel better about their stress levels and also give them the tools to stay in a calm state. By simply sitting with yourself for ten minutes a day, without distractions, try emptying your mind of all thoughts. Whenever you begin to think about something, simply push it out of your mind and try to empty your mind again. The more you practice, the better you will get. This practice allows you to be able to focus on the present moment instead of worrying about the past or the present tasks.
- **Reiki therapy**
While not as common as some of these other treatments, Reiki treatments are thought to help your body tremendously. By lying or sitting up, the practitioner places their hands at certain points of your body to help facilitate healing. It is thought that drawing on an energy source from outside of the practitioner helps to increase the effectiveness.
- **Aromatherapy**
There are also many scents that have been linked with helping to calm the body and to make it more balanced in terms of energy. Aromatherapy practice is based on the idea that when we stimulate the scent receptors in some way, they will then affect the receptors in the brain. Try candles, incense, or oils that have lavender, vanilla, or flower scents.

You might find that a combination of these alternative options can help you begin to find relief for your anxiety.

Without any side effects or drug interactions, these therapies are often recommended before medications. And if they do not provide enough relief, then other treatments are discussed.

If you have any troubles with mobility, be certain to talk to your doctor before attempting anything too strenuous. While yoga and Tai Chi are great for most patients, some find the movements too difficult, so try to watch a class before you sign up for a longer period of practice.

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LIFESTYLE CHANGES

If only you could remove the stress from your life, then you would have little anxiety to worry about, right?

The truth of it is that you can make changes in your lifestyle and begin to see your stress levels diminish. When you take care of your body, it will take care of you too.

NUTRITION AND ANXIETY

Since your body is involved in distributing energy and providing the right signals to the brain and to your organs, you need to make sure you are fueling your body properly.

This is especially the case when it comes to anxiety.

Though it might not seem like nutrition is going to help you feel better, you will find that the more you choose healthy foods, the better your overall moods are.

Many of us will eat junk foods and other unhealthy foods when we are stressed, often creating a damaging cycle. You feel badly about eating these kinds of foods and then you get upset and stressed. This increase in stress causes you to eat more not-so-good foods, etc.

If you want to make sure you are doing the best thing for your body, you will want to start off with a new eating plan.

The first thing you will want to do is to remove these items from your kitchen and from your diet:

- **Sugar**

When you eat a lot of sugar in your diet, you are taking your body on a sort of ride. Eating a lot of sugar will cause the bloodstream to be flooded with this sticky substance. If you're not burning a lot of energy, the sugar will simply stay in the bloodstream or it will be converted into fat for storage. High blood sugar feels pretty good as you are filled with energy...but only momentarily. When the body

finally converts the energy and breaks it up (which is very quickly), you will 'crash.' You might get a headache, get jittery, etc. In fact, blood sugar changes can often make you feel more anxious. And then you get hungry again for more sugar. It's a difficult cycle to break. There's nothing wrong with eating sugary treats from time to time, but you will want to limit these to special occasions when you are having troubles with anxiety.

- **Caffeine**

While it seems like the world runs on caffeine, if you are already anxious, caffeine is only going to make you feel more keyed up and frazzled. The key with caffeine is to use it in moderation. A few cups of coffee in the morning are fine, but drinking soda all day probably isn't the best idea for your body or for your anxiety. Try switching to caffeine free versions of your favorite beverages and foods. Of course, if you have been drinking a lot of caffeine for a long time, you will want to taper off to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

- **Processed foods**

The more chemical ingredients that are listed on the label of as food, the more likely your body is not going to react well with it. In truth, scientists really don't know what these chemicals are doing once they get into your body. When you have troubles with anxiety, you might want to avoid as many chemicals as you can. This means avoiding overly processed foods like prepackaged meals, snacks, etc.

- **MSG**

Monosodium Glutamate is something that is found in many ethnic foods as a flavoring, but it's also been linked with increasing levels of anxiety in some patients.

- **Hormones and pesticides**

If you can, switching to organic foods is recommended when you have troubles with anxiety. The chemicals that are used in the processing most foods can begin to shift your brain chemistry and make you more prone to anxiety issues.

- **Salt**

What you might not realize is that whenever you take in large quantities of salt, your body begins to lose hydration. This can affect the nerve cells in your body, causing you to be more prone to stress and anxiety. Try to limit your salt intake in order to help your brain function at its highest capacity.

After looking at this list, it's obvious to most people that their diet is going to have to change dramatically. And for many people, they might need to go

even further with this list – shunning fats and meats altogether. Over time, you will find what works for you.

What you may want to do is to keep a food diary of what you have eaten, when you have eaten it, and how your anxiety was afterwards.

Now that you know all of the foods you need to avoid, you need to find out what to fill your refrigerator and cupboards with.

Some great foods to stock up on are:

- Whole grains
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Lean meats
- Low fat dairy products
- Beans
- Nuts
- Olive oil
- Fish

These basic categories of food will help you support your body's basic processes, allowing you to maintain a steady stream of energy which can help you deal with anxiety in a much more relaxed manner.

Some other specific foods you might want to try for anxiety include:

- Asparagus
- Avocado
- Brewers yeast
- Carrots
- Celery
- Eggs
- Garlic
- Molasses
- Onions
- Spinach
- Wheat germ

But it's not just about what you eat; it's also about how you eat your foods that can help reduce your anxiety.

When you're stressed, you're prone to unhealthy eating behaviors that can cause you to feel more anxiety symptoms.

Make sure that you:

- **Chew slowly**
When you chew too quickly, you can let in too much air into your stomach, causing stomach pain and gas.
- **Eat smaller portions**
If you are placing large quantities of food in front of you, you can easily eat more than your body needs.
- **Eat sitting down**
When you eat in your car or when you are standing up, you may not be able to interpret satiety signals correctly.
- **Drink a little fluid with your meal**
Try not to drink a large portion of liquid during your meals as it can cause you to have troubles with digestion.
- **Take your time**
Your body needs about 20 minutes to realize that it has eaten, so take your time when you are eating.

Nutrition is very important when it comes to helping your anxiety. If you put the correct 'fuel' in your body, after all, it's bound to run more efficiently.

In addition, there are some supplements and nutrients that you will want to make sure you add to your shopping cart:

- B complex vitamins
- Magnesium
- Calcium

Each of these minerals can be found naturally in foods like red meats and vegetables as well as in dairy products.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Whether you are in therapy or not, you can begin to incorporate behavior modification into your anxiety treatment plan.

Behavior modification is often thought of as something that will involve instructions and rewards, but this is not quite the way it works for anxiety. Since you do not want to encourage the idea that anxiety is bad, this kind of

therapy focuses more on looking at certain behaviors that need to be changes and then working on ways that will help to change them.

On your own, there are many ways you can begin to do your own behavior modification:

- **Distraction**
A common technique taught to panic attack sufferers is to find something else to focus on when they are beginning to feel panicky. They might be told to look at something else and to really take time observing the world around them. For example, if the person feels nervous in a church, they might focus on counting the organ pipes instead of their panic symptoms. What these distraction techniques do is to divert the attention away from the symptoms until the body runs out of adrenaline to push through the body. Since this can take up to an hour, you might need to come up with several healthy ways to distract yourself.
- **Asking questions**
Another way to begin to change the way you react to anxiety is to ask yourself about the anxiety you are feeling. Stop for a minute to find out what you're really upset about and whether this is something you have control over. In most cases, our stress is something that we can do little about. For example, if you are anxious when flying in a plane, you might want to realize that your worry is not going to keep the plane in the air. Try examining what you are thinking and then attempt to break down any thinking that might be heading to a more negative place.
- **Practice mantras and affirmations**
For some patients, having a word or phrase to focus on can help to keep their mind from becoming too anxious. For example, you might want to tell yourself that everything is going to be fine again and again. Some people also like to say, "I'm okay" or "This is going to pass." Whatever appeals to you, try to repeat it to yourself or write it down in a place where you can look at it frequently. This will help you change your thinking and begin to create more positive experiences of your stress.
- **Deep muscle relaxation**
For many people, their bodies become a reflection of their inner stress. They might have headaches and sore muscles whenever they are stressed, making it difficult for them to ignore the stress until it goes away. By learning about deep muscle relaxation, you can begin to soothe these aching muscles. You might start when you are lying in bed at the end of the day. Close your eyes and try to picture the muscles in your feet. This doesn't have to be an accurate

visualization. Just picture the muscles and try to tense them for a second or two. Then release them and feel how much looser they feel. Keep doing this with each group of muscles, working up your body all the way to your head. The more you do this, the more you will be able to release muscular tension whenever it's necessary. Of course, this can also be achieved with a deep tissue massage.

- **Communication courses**

If you have troubles getting up in front of an audience or you simply feel like your anxiety has gotten in the way of your communication skills, you might want to take a communication course or a public speaking course to help you feel more comfortable. Though you might be nervous at first, many people in the class will be feeling the exact same way that you do.

- **Assertiveness training**

With the help of a therapist, you might want to learn more about being assertive with others. More specialized than communication courses, this will focus on getting you to stand up for yourself. Since many people feel anxiety during conflict, it's a great idea to learn how to interact with others in a way that both helps you feel more confident and that helps others still get what they want from the interaction – without taking advantage of you at the same time.

- **Phobia immersion**

You may also work with a therapist that guides you through particular phobias in order to help you get over your fears of these specific situations. For example, you might get into an elevator with a therapist and they will talk you through your thinking as you are getting anxious. By continuing to return to the fear inducing situation, you will begin to learn how to healthfully deal with these feelings.

- **Breathing retraining**

You might also want to learn more about how to breathe through stress when you begin to feel yourself get stressed. By learning how to breathe deeply more often, you can begin to flood your body with oxygen and that can help you feel more in control of the situation.

- **Organization training**

For some people, they need to have better organization systems in place in order to help them manage their workload or life more easily (and with less stress). You may want to consider hiring a professional organizer or some similar professional to help you figure out what kind of organization system will work best for you and for your life. By creating a system that works for you, you can begin to feel like your life isn't taking over.

There are many ways that you can begin to modify your behavior in order to reduce the anxiety in your life.

Many people will actually end up doing these kinds of therapies on their own, while others will need professional intervention. In the end, you will need to do some form of behavioral therapy as your anxiety is causing you to do things you don't want to be doing anymore.

EXERCISE AND MOOD

While you've heard about the benefits of exercise for your body, can it also help your anxiety too?

Just as with changing your diet, changing your activity levels can help you with your moods and your stress levels. There are a number of reasons why exercise helps:

- Exercise can help you produce feel good endorphins
- Activity can help you reduce muscular tension
- A fun activity can divert your attention from stress
- Adding exercise seems to elevate certain neurotransmitters in the brain
- Reduces the levels of cortisol in the body (a stress chemical)
- More activity can help with sleep disturbances

More and more studies are showing that exercise can help you balance your body as well as your moods, so it's no wonder that many doctors are recommending that patients attempt exercise and diet changes first before trying medications or therapy.

But since you're under stress, it might be hard to see how you can even fit exercise into your life.

The definition of exercise doesn't have to mean that you spend hours in the gym, but it does mean that you need to get more regular activity in your daily life.

This might include structured exercise programs or something like a team sport.

The current recommendation for exercise in relation to anxiety is for patients to exercise for thirty minutes a day three to five days a week. This exercise should have your heart rate increased to a point where you feel like you're working hard, but not so hard that you can't speak.

The main goal is to make sure you are getting some sort of exercise every day, even if it's in shorter bursts of ten to fifteen minutes. Even these short spurts have been shown to help improve your mood immediately.

There are a number of ways you can use exercise to help you with your anxiety:

- **Preventative**

It has been shown that patients who are more physically active tend to have fewer bouts of anxiety than those who do not exercise regularly. If you are not feeling stress, this means you should still be exercising so that you're 'ready' when the next stressful time in your life starts. You might also want to begin a more regular exercise program if you are anticipating stress or if you already have mild anxiety as this can help you reduce the severity of your stress.

- **Management**

Whether you are in the throes of a panic attack or some other anxiety response, you might want to try exercise as a way to change the way your body feels. By heading out the door for a walk or turning on your mp3 player and dancing around, you can begin to change the chemical disruption in your body and perhaps even stop the stress response altogether. For example, if you are under a lot of pressure at work, make sure to still schedule time in for exercise. It will help you control your stress responses. Many patients find that their stress is more productive instead of disruptive when they are exercising regularly. Others like the time away from the stress to think over problems they're having.

- **Maintenance**

For those who are undergoing treatment for anxiety, it has been shown that those people who continue to exercise throughout and after their treatment will have an easier time maintaining their progress. Exercise has been linked with preventing relapse in patients with more severe cases of anxiety and other stress related disorders.

As you can see, exercise is certainly a helpful way to manage your anxiety, but are there certain types of exercise that are better than others?

Much of the exercise you choose to do will be determined by your activity level as well as by your doctor's recommendations. If you haven't exercised in a long period of time, you will want to have a complete physical to see whether or not you are fit enough to begin the program you had in mind.

If you get the go ahead, you have a number of different exercises that can help you start feeling better:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Team sports
- Biking
- Aerobics
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Etc.

Any activity in which you increase your heart rate is perfect for reducing and preventing anxiety.

But the key is to choose things that you actually enjoy doing.

Here are some other tips to get your exercise program started:

- **Find an activity buddy**
When you exercise with a friend or other loved one, you are more likely to stick with the activity. Find a walking partner at work or walk with your spouse after dinner to help manage your anxiety.
- **Change activities often**
Instead of doing the same thing every day, make sure to change up your activities whenever you begin to feel like you're not as excited to do the activity anymore. You might want to take different classes at your gym or maybe just try different walking or jogging routes.
- **Bring music along with you**
For many people, they become bored with exercise, so they're less likely to stick with it. But since music players are more prevalent than ever and inexpensive, why not fill up your personal music player with fun, high energy music to help keep you moving during your activity? Just be sure that you aren't being distracted too much from the environment you are in.
- **Start slowly**
When people hear that exercise can help with anxiety, they want to immediately jump into a big exercise program, but this might not be the best idea if it's been a while since you've moved. Try starting with just a few minutes a day and then slowly add more until you feel comfortable with the time you spend working out.

- **Make it a priority**
More of us would exercise if we simply made it a priority. When you begin to think of exercise as a part of your anxiety treatment plan, you might start taking it more seriously. Pencil in the times when you will be exercising and then stick to them.
- **Keep an exercise log**
Since we tend to not notice our own improvement, try keeping an exercise log of what you do each day. Write down the distance you walked/jog/swam and then notice how you are getting stronger each time. You might also want to write down times when you simply didn't feel like going, but you made yourself anyways.
- **Buy the right equipment**
Try to make sure you have the right fitness clothes and shoes for the activity you want to do. You don't have to spend a lot of money to keep your body safe and warm as you workout.
- **Try DVDs and videos**
To keep things exciting, try new exercise videos from your local video store. This is a cheaper route than buying them and it gives you a chance to see if the DVD is any good before you decide to buy it.

Exercise needs to be a part of your life if you want to push your body away from anxiety and into good health.

Make exercise and activity the new goal of each day and you will notice your moods lift.

LEARNING TO SAY NO

One of the ways that many of us find ourselves in more stressful situations than we'd like is by saying 'yes' when we should be saying 'no.'

And it's understandable.

We want to please people, so we say yes to things that we can't handle or that will overburden us – just because we want others to appreciate us. But in the end, we become resentful that the person even asked us in the first place.

Those feelings can then turn into more stress. We are not only made at the other person, but we're also made at ourselves.

To stop this process, we need to learn how to say no when we mean to say no.

This is called creating boundaries. And while that sounds like it would be a limiting thing, it's actually something that allows more freedom for us. When we create boundaries, we allow ourselves the opportunity to do the things that we really enjoy instead of pushing through the things that we don't really like.

That said, the art of creating boundaries is not something most of us are taught when we grow up.

We may have been told that saying yes is the best way to get ahead in life and that the more we take on, the better a person we are. But when you are suffering from anxiety, you need to begin to focus more on yourself and not what other people will think of your choices.

No matter what you do, people are going to be upset. You might be able to win a gold medal at the Olympics, but your little sister might be upset that you spent all that time practicing.

Boundaries are about establishing how people can treat you and how you want to be treated. You and your therapist can work on this in a clinical setting, but these limitations can also be defined on your own.

Here are some tips for creating boundaries and learning to say no when you really mean to say no.

- **Figure out when you should have said no in the past**
We tend to kick ourselves after we've let someone take advantage of us. We sit there and ask ourselves, "Why did I just say yes to that?" Instead of beating ourselves up, we can use these times to learn when we need to be ready to say no. For example, if a certain coworker always asks you to do extra work for them on Fridays because they want to leave early, you can identify this as a potential situation in which you can practice saying no and prepare for it.
- **Practice saying no to those in our families**
Too often, the people we should feel most comfortable saying no to are the ones we truly can not turn down. So, try saying no to things that your family asks you to do. This might be difficult at first and you will get some resistance, but they will understand in time what you are trying to do.
- **Ask yourself if you want to say yes**
So often, when we are anxious, we forget to slow down and to think about what someone is asking us. This leads to us saying yes to

things we really don't want to do. So, stop for a minute and ask yourself if you really want to do the thing you're being asked to do. If so, then you can say yes without feeling bad about it. And if you say no, you also won't feel badly for it.

- **Find ways of saying no**

It sounds silly, but when we're not used to saying no to people, we actually need to learn how to do it. "I'm sorry, but I can't" is good, as is "I wish I could help you, but I can't." Find different ways that you can say no without giving any way for a person to misinterpret it.

- **Don't explain your reasoning**

While you might say no, when you begin to rationalize your answer to someone, it shows that you're not really sure about the decision you made. Instead of doing this, you can simply stop after saying no. Most people will not ask you for an explanation and if they do, you don't have to say anything more than, "I'm just not available."

- **Delay your answer**

If you are having troubles saying no to someone, you might want to delay your answer. If they need an answer right then, you can simply say no then.

- **Try to figure out the value of saying yes**

What will you get out of saying yes to a project or to a party? If you can't answer that question, you might want to simply say no.

- **Schedule your time for other things**

Instead of keeping your calendar open just in case someone needs you, make sure to fill up your time with things you enjoy doing. That way, when someone does ask you to do something, you can honestly tell them that you are already busy during that time.

Of course, if you don't know how busy you are, you might have troubles with determining whether or not you should say no.

Try keeping a list of the items you need to do that you can easily refer to, or you might want to use a computer program to block out certain times in order to see immediately whether or not you are free to complete a certain project.

What you need to understand in the end is that you only have so many hours in the day and you can't fill them all up with the things that others want you to do.

When you say no, you're actually saying yes to your own life and the things that are important to you.

CONCLUSION

While we're all going to be stressed out at one point or another in our lives, this doesn't mean that we need to let anxiety run our lives.

If you've been feeling nervous, anxious, or just overwhelmed more often than not, you may have a treatable form of anxiety.

Having a mental issue doesn't carry the stigma that it used to – and with so many millions of people facing anxiety disorders, it certainly shouldn't.

Realizing that you need help is the first step toward having fewer stress filled days. There are treatment options that will help you learn to manage day to day stress, while also allowing you the chance to unlearn unhealthy behaviors and thought patterns that might be causing you physical symptoms.

Anxiety may feel like the end of the world, but it certainly isn't.