

ANXIETY

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Our body has a natural alarm system to warn us that something is wrong. Instead of sirens and lights, our alarm sends out anxiety and physical symptoms, including:

- Chest pain, racing heart
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Nausea, stomach ache, diarrhea
- Numbness, tingling sensations
- Sweating, chills
- Trembling or shaking

NORMAL ANXIETY

Here the alarm system is useful and steers us away from danger. People can also seek out anxiety on purpose, as when they line up for a roller coaster or action film. False alarms are also normal: random panic attacks are normal and do not require treatment unless they lead to a continuous state of fear and avoidance.

SECONDARY ANXIETY

Medical and psychiatric problems can set off our alarms. In these cases, the alarm is normal because there really is something wrong, and the answer is to treat the underlying problem.

ANXIETY DISORDERS

Anxiety disorders are a vicious cycle where our alarm leads to fear and avoidance, which then causes more alarm. The medical term for this cycle is phobia; common phobias include:

- Speaking in public

- Meeting people
- Agoraphobia (fear of being in crowded or open places that are hard to get out of, or of leaving the home alone)
- Heights
- Planes

People can also have phobias of things inside themselves, such as:

- Panic disorder: a phobia of panic attacks.
- Generalized anxiety disorder: a phobia of worried or anxious thoughts.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder: a phobia of memories or reminders of past trauma.

Surprisingly, anxiety disorders are not treated by reducing the anxiety but by reducing the phobia. This makes sense when you consider that anxiety is a normal symptom, even when it goes off for the wrong reason. If the anxiety was reduced without changing the phobia, it would only return again.

Below are options for anxiety disorders:

LIFESTYLE

AEROBIC EXERCISE

Aerobic activity, which raises your pulse by 10 beats per minute, can reduce anxiety after 3-4 weeks. It should be done 30 minutes a day (or as 3 10-minute chunks).

MUSCLE RELAXATION

This involves slowly tensing and releasing each of the core muscle groups in your body.

www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/explore.html

DEEP BREATHING

Regular diaphragmatic breathing can reduce physical symptoms of anxiety.

www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/explore.html

MINDFULNESS

This form of mental training can treat anxiety and change the brain when practiced daily. A free audio guide is on our website, and we also offer group and individual education in mindfulness:

www.moodtreatmentcenter.com/mindfulness.htm

THERAPY

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

This therapy causes changes in the brain which can lead to a long-lasting recovery from anxiety disorders. The therapist helps you find ways to overcome the avoidance and worry that anxiety brings.

www.anxieties.com, ecouch.anu.edu.au

Book: The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook, E Bourne

ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT

This therapy helps people move beyond the inner struggle of anxiety so they can live more in line with their goals and values:

www.contextualscience.org/free_videos

Book: Get out of your mind & into your life, S Hayes

THERAPIES FOR PTSD

Specialized therapies for PTSD help people restore the sense of safety and trust that trauma disrupted.

People learn how to experience traumatic memories with less anxiety and more control.

Examples include Cognitive Behavior Therapy

(www.anxieties.com) and Eye Movement

Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR,

www.emdria.org).

SUPPORT GROUPS

Several local groups meet regularly to share information and support on living with depression.

The Mental Health Association keeps a listing of meeting times:

www.triadmentalhealth.org

www.moodtreatmentcenter.com

MEDICINE + THERAPY

Therapy for anxiety brings about changes in the brain through regular exercises that you take on outside of session. Cycloserine is a medicine which enhances learning and can help the brain overcome anxiety when taken before such exercises. In contrast, some medications impair the ability to learn from these exercises, particularly benzodiazepines and alcohol.

MEDICINES

ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Certain antidepressants can gradually reduce anxiety over 3-4 weeks without causing addiction.

Serotonin agents: fluoxetine (prozac), sertraline (zoloft), citalopram (celexa), escitalopram (lexapro), paroxetine (paxil), fluvoxamine (luvox), vortioxetine (brintellix), vilazodone (viibryd).

Dual agents (SNRIs): venlafaxine (effexor), desvenlafaxine (pristiq), duloxetine (cymbalta), milnacipran (savella).

Tricyclics: amitriptyline (elavil), clomipramine (anafranil), doxepin (sinequan), imipramine (tofranil), nortriptyline (pamelor), protriptyline (vivactil), trimipramine (sumontil), desipramine (norpramin). Tetracyclic versions: maprotiline, amoxapine.

Other: mirtazapine (remeron)

BUSPIRONE (BUSPAR)

Treats multiple types of anxiety, non-addictive, well tolerated without weight gain or sexual side effects.

PROPRANOLOL (INDERAL)

This blood pressure medicine reduces physical symptoms of anxiety such as tremor and racing heart. It can be taken as needed and is non-addictive.

ANTICONVULSANTS

Benefits: reduce anxiety (particularly generalized and social anxiety); improve sleep and chronic pain; non-addictive.

Risks: fatigue, dizziness. Pregabalin has weight gain.

Examples: gabapentin (neurontin), pregabalin (lyrica).

MEDICATIONS FOR PTSD

Antidepressants: Serotonin agents and mirtazapine can reduce many symptoms of PTSD.

Blood pressure medicines: Prazosin is very effective for nightmares. Propranolol can help prevent PTSD if taken soon after a traumatic event.

BENZODIAZEPINES

Benefits: reduce anxiety quickly but daily use can lead to addiction and worsened anxiety in the long-term.

Risks: these medicines are safer than alcohol but have similar properties to alcohol in the brain. They can impair memory, cause dependence and falls.

Examples: clonazepam (klonopin and wafers), diazepam (valium), lorazepam (ativan), oxazepam (serax), alprazolam (xanax, xanax-XR), temazepam (restoril), chlordiazepoxide (librium), clorazepate (tranxene), estazolam (prosom), flurazepam (dalmane), quazepam (dural), triazolam (halcion).

NATURAL

SILEXAN (LAVENDER)

This extract of lavender is a prescription medicine in Germany and available in the U.S. through NatureWay. In clinical studies, it out-performed one of the most effective medications for anxiety (paroxetine or paxil).

PROBIOTICS

These healthy bacteria are known to help digestion and in one study also reduced anxiety. They are available in pill form (a medical research group has recommended the Align brand), or in yogurts and other foods.

AROMATHERAPY

Many scents (mainly lavender; also orange scents, saffron, rose, ylangylang, rosemary, bergamot, chamomile, lemon, sandalwood, almond, vetivert, bergamot, and geranium) have a mild benefit for anxiety.

CHAMOMILE

Available as a tea or in tablet form, daily chamomile can reduce anxiety.

RHODIOLA ROSEA

This herb acts similarly to antidepressants in the brain, enhancing serotonin and dopamine and protecting brain cells.