

A Natural Approach to Anxiety and Panic Attacks

By Carrie Casey

A cold sweat, heart palpitations, trembling, faintness, a sense of pressure in the chest and/or dry mouth, mild to severe apprehension or uneasiness over a present or impending event; these can all be signs of anxiety which, if severe enough, can result in a panic attack. A panic attack occurs when anxiety is so severe that a person starts breathing in a rapid, shallow manner and can become so tense to the point that he or she has the inability to act. The good news is that you can often alleviate the causes of anxiety and panic attacks through diet and lifestyle changes.

A Body Systems Approach

Although all body systems are involved in maintaining good health, three systems in particular may be involved when anxiety interferes with our everyday living. These three systems are the **Glandular System**, the **Nervous System** and the **Immune System**.

The **Glandular System** contains, among other glands, the adrenal glands, which are situated on top of each kidney. When the adrenal glands are weak or over-worked, adrenal exhaustion can result. Addison's disease is another name for adrenal exhaustion.

Signs and symptoms of adrenal exhaustion include dark circles and or puffiness under the eyes, blood pressure that is below 95 over 64, and developing arthritis or high blood pressure during or right after menopause. Crohn's and Celiac disease may also be associated with adrenal exhaustion. Children born with allergies and colic may have adrenal exhaustion as well.

The **Nervous System** is also often involved with anxiety. According to herbalist Steven Horne, it is necessary to calm down the function of the sympathetic nervous system (the part that stimulates fight or flight functions) and to increase the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system (the part that stimulates resting functions). This can be done with supplements, diet, and lifestyle changes.

If the **Immune System** is weak, not only is it more difficult to fight off disease or infection, it is also hard for us to stand up for ourselves (or fight for ourselves, as the case may be). This can leave us feeling helpless and in a panic. Bolstering up the immune system can help us be "brave, courageous and bold" when we need to be.

Change Your Diet, Change Your Life

The following recommendations may be helpful in supporting the Glandular, Nervous, and Immune systems.

1. Eat regularly throughout the day. If you don't eat at regular intervals, your blood sugar can drop, which can worsen anxiety. For adrenal exhaustion, you may want to eat 5-6 servings of protein foods each day. These should be about the size of your palm. Include nuts, seeds, beans, etc. as alternative protein sources. Eat an equivalent amount of vegetables each day.
2. Eat a good breakfast or a meal replacement with adequate protein. Protein supports the adrenal glands. Eggs are good choices; remember to buy organic. If you have adrenal exhaustion and you skip breakfast, it can result in hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). If you cannot handle eating breakfast, try to eat at least a handful of almonds or walnuts. Do this before 10:00 a.m.
3. Drink plenty of water. Unless you have a medical condition that restricts fluid intake, drink 1/2 ounce water for each pound of body weight. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, drink 100 ounces of water each day.
4. Reduce or eliminate caffeine, as it may worsen symptoms of anxiety, says James F. Balch, M.D. in *Prescription for Drug Alternatives*. This includes coffee, black tea (herbal teas are O.K.), chocolate or other foods containing caffeine. Beware of "energy drinks." Read the labels. They often contain large amounts of caffeine.
5. Eliminate white sugar and white flour and foods containing them. These foods have been refined or de-natured to the point where there is little or no nutrition found in them. In addition, white sugar can deplete your B-vitamins, which are critical for a healthy nervous system.

Lifestyle Changes

The following changes to your present lifestyle can have a profound effect on your health

1. Limit your exposure to electronics. With computers, cell phones, blackberries, and Ipods, in addition to TV's and radios, we are being bombarded by electrical frequencies that may have an adverse effect on our health.
2. Are you a news-aholic? Are you addicted to CNN? Do you listen to negative talk shows for hours on end? All of these things can have a profound effect on our lives. Constant bombardment of bad news, especially things that we cannot personally do anything about, can weaken us physically. Please limit your news watching or listening and balance it with news that is uplifting.
3. Sleep is CRITICAL. Sleep deprivation can result in blood sugar balancing issues. It can also affect your weight. The less you sleep, the more likely you are to be obese. Sleep deprivation can also cause immune system changes, including a decreased number of natural killer cells and reduced activity of those cells. Also, less than 6 hours of sleep each night can affect our daily performance and overall productivity,

which can lead to more anxiety. Do your best to sleep at least 6-8 hours each night. If you have problems getting to sleep, try focusing on your breathing. This usually takes your mind off your problems, while also helping to relax your body and mind.

4. Exercise for 30 minutes each day. If you are new to exercising, you can start with walking, Tai Chi or Yoga. According to *Woman's World Magazine* 5/24/10, yoga has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety. "With its specific postures and deep abdominal breathing techniques, yoga relaxes the body so well, it can control panic attacks in up to three out of four sufferers, scientists found."
5. Spend some time outdoors. Go to the beach or mountains or some place from your childhood where you felt peaceful and happy. Do your best to notice and appreciate the limitless diversity of nature.
6. Prayer and positive thinking can change your life for the better. Focus on how you want your life (and world!) to be. Being critical and judgmental of others only causes people to be critical and judgmental of you. Live and let live.

Herbs and Supplements to the Rescue!

The following herbs and supplements can help to support the body in times of stress. If you are taking any prescription medications or have any medical conditions, it is always wise to consult your healthcare practitioner before taking herbs and supplements. It is always a good idea to consult with an herbalist before deciding which supplements are appropriate for you. All are available at Cherokee Herb Shop in Rome.

1. Good **Multivitamin**: A good choice is Complete Multiple from Liquid Health. Being a liquid, it absorbs quickly for fast results. Also try Life Essence Multi.
2. **Nutricalm**: Nutricalm from Nature's Sunshine, is a B-Complex with an adequate amount of Vitamin C and adrenal supporting herbs. When we are stressed, we may use up our B and C vitamins at an accelerated rate.
3. **Adrenal Support**: This supplement from Nature's Sunshine contains bovine adrenal substance, vitamins, minerals, herbs and more to support the adrenal glands.
4. **AnxiousLess**: This fabulous supplement from Nature's Sunshine combines the calming and anxiety-reducing amino acid l-theanine with minerals and B1 to quickly ease anxiousness without drowsiness. It can also help to promote a feeling of confidence and security while improving mood and reducing fatigue.
5. **Anxiety Free**: For stress relief, this product has it all-B vitamins, L-theanine, tonic herbs and Ayurvedic herbs. Ridgecrest Herbals formulated this product to increase calm and well-being, relieve stress and tension and reduce fatigue and irritability. Works fast!
6. **Adrenal Fatigue Fighter**: Vitamins, herbs and amino acids are blended together in this unique product from Ridgecraft Herbals designed to increase energy, improve mood and focus, and balance cortisol levels. Results are usually felt within minutes or hours.

7. **Adrenal Stability:** This all herbal formula from Pure Essence Labs combines the finest adaptogenic herbs that have been used for centuries to support the adrenal glands to help the body's ability to adapt to stress
8. **Thai-go** is a super antioxidant drink from Nature's Sunshine containing a variety of juices and extracts from around the world. It is excellent for giving you energy and supporting the immune system.
9. **Lobelia:** As a relaxant, it's hard to beat lobelia. It can be used for a wide array of ailments but always be respectful of it and don't over-use it. It is considered to be excellent for nervous disorders.
10. **Passionflower:** Dr. Oz recommended passionflower on his television show recently. Passionflower has mild sedative properties and may be effective for mild to moderate anxiety.
11. **5-HTP:** According to Dr. James Balch, M.D., 5-HTP is an amino acid that increases the brain's production of serotonin, which promotes relaxation. According to him, it has been shown to improve the symptoms of anxiety. It should not be combined with anti-depressants or other serotonin enhancing medications or supplements. It should also be avoided by those with Down's syndrome.
12. **L-Theanine:** This amino acid can be used for its relaxing and anti-anxiety effects. It may also reduce irritability and low mood states. It may also increase the levels of the neurotransmitters GABA and serotonin.
13. **GABA:** Another amino acid that may be helpful is GABA. Keep in mind that amino acids come from protein foods, so it's easy to understand why a lack of protein can be problematic to those with anxiety/panic disorders. GABA has anti-anxiety and mild sedative properties and may be helpful for those with mild to moderate anxiety.
14. **Geranium Essential Oil:** This delightful smelling essential oil supports the adrenal cortex, which is part of the adrenal gland. It may help to relax nerves and calm feelings of anxiety. You can put several drops in a glass spray bottle and use it as a room spray or use it undiluted in a room diffuser.
15. **Flower Essences:** These gentle flower tinctures work on helping the sick "person", not just the sick "body". The originator of flower essences was Dr. Edward Bach who lived in England during the 1930's. He believed in treating the patient, not the disease. He felt that when the negative thoughts had been overcome, the body would also respond. He created what is called **Rescue Remedy**, which is composed of 5 flower essences that can be used anytime you feel stressed. It is available in a spray that you put on the tongue or drops that go under the tongue for fast absorption. It is also available in a version for children and in a version for pets that experience fear or anxiety.
16. **Life Essence:** This complete multivitamin and mineral supplement is enhanced by an energizing blend of superior herbs, antioxidant-rich fruit extracts and

thousands of vital phytochemicals not found in table foods. It comes in tablet or powder form that can be mixed with your favorite juice or smoothie.

If you have been experiencing anxiety or panic attacks over a long period of time, it may take as long as a year or more to rebuild the adrenal glands and stabilize the other body systems involved. However, by doing so, your general health and outlook on life should also improve significantly.

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