



Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Natural remedies to ease stress, anxiety, restlessness and feelings of panic

When we hear the word anxiety, many of us don't think of it as a major medical problem. After all, everyone feels anxious sometimes, whether it's before a business meeting, a public presentation or even just talking to a spouse about finances. But for some, anxiety is a serious concern, which hampers their ability to lead normal lives. When anxiety becomes a persistent pattern, psychologists call it Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)—and estimate that nine to 12 million Americans suffer from it every year. People suffering from chronic anxiety often experience several or more of the following symptoms:

- twitching or trembling, particularly of the hands
- muscle tension and headaches
- sweating
- dry mouth and difficulty swallowing
- abdominal pain (especially in children)
- dizziness
- rapid or irregular heartbeat
- rapid breathing
- diarrhea or frequent urination
- fatigue
- irritability and difficulty controlling one's temper
- sleeping difficulties and nightmares
- difficulty concentrating
- sexual dysfunction

With this many possible symptoms, it's easy to see why chronic anxiety can be difficult to diagnose and separate from other health problems. Some people's anxiety is so severe it triggers a more intense reaction—something psychologists call panic disorder, also known as panic attacks. These affect another two percent of the population, or five to six million people. Occurring periodically, panic attacks involve many of the symptoms of anxiety on a more intense level, as well as some of the following:

- sensation of shortness of breath/impression of smothering
- feeling of choking
- fear of dying/losing control/going crazy
- feelings of unreality or detachment

In addition to these symptoms people suffering from panic attacks sometimes experience other anxiety or mood disorders. For instance, they sometimes develop phobias about places or situations where panic attacks have occurred.

The most common response to anxiety or panic in this culture, unfortunately, is to grab for the pills, usually medications in the benzodiazepine category, like Valium®, Xanax® and Halcion®. Unfortunately, these drugs have been shown to create both dependence and addiction, and all three have been linked to impaired mental function.

The good news is that there are very effective alternatives for those who are willing to try them. The first is: eat a good diet. Meals high in refined sugars and simple carbohydrates cause blood sugar fluctuations which directly and immediately contribute to stress and can trigger or intensify anxiety and panic. Caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and recreational drugs can do the same by wreaking havoc with various chemical balances in the body.

Other lifestyle aids include getting sufficient sleep and exercising regularly. Balancing work and responsibilities with time for play and fun activities will also help. Keeping a journal to record one's moods and what triggers them can be very helpful, both in identifying anxiety triggers and in taking action to change them. Finally, learning relaxation techniques like guided imagery, progressive relaxation, yoga, tai chi and meditation can help people to move from feeling out of control back to feeling "in the groove."

When it comes to nutrition, it is very important to take care of the adrenal glands. These glands produce the stress hormones involved in anxiety and panic attacks, and a constant state of anxiety will deplete them over time. NutriCalm helps support both the adrenals and the nerves with B vitamins, vitamin C and various herbs. It feeds the adrenals and nerves and helps to reduce feelings of stress and restlessness. Adaptagens like Eleuthero root, Suma Combination and Adaptamax can help to reduce adrenal output of stress hormones.

NSP's Adrenal Support can help to nourish and rebuild adrenal glands depleted by chronic stress, especially where chronic stress and/or frequent use of caffeine is involved. Where there is fatigue, coupled with restless sleep patterns and sensations of pressure over the heart, Nervous Fatigue Formula is often helpful.

To relax the nerves, nervines like Kava Kava and Lobelia work wonders. These can be taken during an anxiety episode or panic attack to help calm nervous functions and restore a sense of inner peace. In between attacks, Stress-J can be taken to help keep the nerves calm. Magnesium is also helpful for calming nerves. Finally, essential oils like chamomile, lavender, pine, sandalwood and marjoram can have a powerful effect in easing feelings of stress, anxiety and panic. They can be diluted in a carrier oil and used for a relaxing massage or added to a warm Epsom salt bath.

Given these natural therapies' lack of ill effects, it would be ridiculous not to try them before reaching for the medicine cabinet to pop one of the more problematic pharmaceuticals. For help in determining what supplements and lifestyle changes are right for you, consult your local herb specialist or *The Comprehensive Guide to Nature's Sunshine Products* by Tree of Light Publishing.

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