



## ANXIETY DISORDERS

A common problem that affects people of all ages, anxiety disorders seems more common in women than in men, however, the jury is still out on that one, since it appears that men are less inclined to report or acknowledge the problem. Anxiety disorders may be acute or chronic. When acute, it may manifest itself as a “panic attack”. The attacks are usually abrupt and intense, and can last from a few seconds up to half an hour. This is experienced by a racing heart, and rapid breathing, and an overall tenseness in the muscles. This is also known as the fight or flight response. When this occurs, a surge of adrenalin is released. The effect can even change the composition of the blood making it more prone to clotting. Other feelings one may describe in a panic attack are shortness of breath, numbness or tingling, inability to think straight, palpitations, a claustrophobic sensation, sweating, nausea, or a distorted perception of time. Eventually, this disorder can have other cumulative effects, such as generalized aches and pains, depression, insomnia, decreased libido, and an inability to relax. Such unpredictable events can have the person believing that they are suffering from a stroke or heart attack. Most are triggered by stress whether it is conscious or unconscious, from certain emotions, or may also be brought on by certain foods, drugs or illness. Food allergies and low blood sugar are a common complaint among those who suffer from anxiety disorders, which can promote an attack. Women can manifest changes in their menstrual cycle as well.

Unfortunately, some people who suffer from this disorder become afraid of being alone or of going to public places due to the fear of having an attack. This of course leads to more anxiety and may result in living their lives with abnormal restrictions. Although panic attacks were considered psychosomatic years ago, experts have found a real physical basis. They believe it is caused primarily by a malfunction in brain chemistry. The brain sends and receives false “emergency signals”. Certain areas of the brain may be hyperactive and release nor epinephrine causing the pulse, blood pressure, and breathing to become more rapid. Chronic anxiety is more generalized with a vague feeling of anxiety most of the time. They feel uneasy around other people, and startle very easily. They may also have panic attacks occasionally as well. Whether internal or interpersonal, conflict promotes a state of anxiety.

**There are some things we can do to help those who suffer from anxiety disorder.**

First, it is important for those that suffer from these symptoms to take the time to search within themselves. They need to address what is going on in their lives. Are they burdened with relationship problems, work issues, or is there some other influence that caused this to happen? Is this a new problem, or has it increased over time? Speaking to a qualified

professional is something to be considered as well.

Nutrition is paramount. It is crucial to ensure that one is taking the appropriate antioxidant vitamins when going through stressful times, as these are the nutrients that are affected the most. Calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, and potassium are nutrients that are most often depleted by stress. Some of the foods that contain these are: apricots, asparagus, avocados, bananas, dried fruits, salmon, garlic, green leafy vegetables, legumes raw nuts and seeds. Also, try eating small, frequent meals instead of the large dinner at night. Limit animal protein and concentrate on complex carbohydrates and vegetable protein. Spinach is a high protein vegetable. Avoid foods high in refined sugars, alcohol and caffeine. The diet should be void of simple sugars and carbonated soft drinks. Keeping a diary of your food intake may be helpful in learning what may trigger panic attacks, since food allergies and sensitivities may trigger an attack.

Get regular exercise – anything that you like doing will suffice. Most people notice a decrease in their symptoms after a few weeks of exercise. I find dancing is very therapeutic, since it incorporates music and exercise. It is also a fun activity!

Learn relaxation techniques. Biofeedback and meditation can be helpful. (See section on stress). Adequate sleep is important as well. And of course the simple yet obvious – talking things over with a trusted friend or family member. Sometimes talking can diffuse anxiety. Music is a great therapy for anxiety disorders, as is aromatherapy.

A note about taking antidepressants such as tofranil or Janamin It is important to have iron levels monitored, as low iron levels in the presence of these medications may increase the risk of developing anxiety and jitteriness.

Amino acids such as DLPA are sometimes used for treating anxiety disorders and depression. It is important to be closely monitored by a nutritionally oriented physician.

GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), is an amino acid necessary for brain function. When combined with Vit B6 has a tranquilizing effect. The recommended dose is 750 mg. -twice a day. Although this is a nutrient, for panic disorders, the whole nutritional state must be in order - this would not be my first choice, but it won't hurt, as long one is taking the appropriate other vitamins as well.

As far as herbal treatments, there are several supplements that are available to help with this disorder. Chamomile is one that is often used in teas. A note regarding chamomile, is that if used over a prolonged period of time it may cause sensitivity to ragweed. If you are allergic to ragweed, this is not one for you. Skullcap and valerian can be taken at night – it promotes sleep and can help with nighttime panic attacks. Other herbs that may promote relaxations are hops, passionflower, linden flower, motherwort, catnip and cramp bark. Avoid MaHuang (ephedra) as it can aggravate anxiety. It was most often seen as an ingredient of many over the counter diet aids. Kava Kava and valerian root both can cause drowsiness. (esp. the valerian.) And I would recommend if you do take them, not to take the combination of both, and better to take at night.