

10 Ways to Beat Anxiety Naturally

Trouble concentrating, digestive problems, headaches, heart palpitations, tossing and turning all night—for the millions of Americans suffering from anxiety, the only thing worse than the condition itself are the side effects caused by the most popular drugs prescribed to treat it.

Benzodiazepines such as Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin and Valium work by depressing the central nervous system, which takes the edge off anxiety but can also put people into a mental fog.

The drugs are addictive, come with some brain-numbing side effects and are responsible for some 8,000 overdose deaths every year. Furthermore, a 2014 study suggested that “benzos” may increase the risk of dementia. Researchers found that people who took the drugs for three months or more had a 32 percent increased risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease, and those on the drugs for six months or more upped their risk by 84 percent.

Despite the dangers of the drugs, more than 15 million American adults use them.

“People have anxiety, and they are thinking about functioning, and ‘What’s the best way I can get through life?’ ” says Maryland-based addiction specialist Dr. Peter Cohen. “It’s human nature to take the path of least resistance.”

But the easy way may not be the best in the long run. Here are 10 proven ways to reduce anxiety without taking drugs:

- 1. Have a sip of bliss.** Studies show that compounds in chamomile and green tea have soothing effects. Drink them hot for best results.

2. Don't worry, be hoppy. Hops, the same compound that give beer its bitterness, also has tranquilizing properties. But you can't down enough brew to get the full effect, so take an extract or tincture of the active ingredient, volatile oil.

3. Try aromatherapy. Some essential oils—lavender, rose, frankincense, ylang ylang, bergamot and vetiver—are known for their calming capabilities. Mist them in a diffuser or rub a few drops on the bottom of your feet.

4. Take adaptogens. Scientific research shows that adaptogenic herbs such as ginseng, rhodiola, ashwagandha and eleuthera root help to regulate levels of the stress-triggered hormone cortisol.

5. Heat things up. Who hasn't felt the relaxing effects of a hot bath? Saunas, steam rooms, Jacuzzis, lying in the sun or sitting close to a campfire also help to melt your cares away. Studies show that heat relaxes muscles and eases tension.

6. Embrace Mother Nature. A stroll through the local park is a great respite from the helter-skelter of modern life. Researchers say that taking a hike in natural surroundings where you can hear birds chirping and leaves rustling in trees lowers stress hormones when compared to walking in an urban environment.

7. Gut it out. One way to peace and calmness may be through the stomach. Studies show that keeping your gut flora robust, with the help of probiotics, reduces stress and anxiety levels. Two of the bacterium researched are *bifidobacterium longum* and *lactobacillus helveticus*.

8. Get moving. Exercise is one of the simplest, most convenient and cheapest ways to bust stress. "Scientists have found that regular participation in aerobic exercise has been shown to decrease overall levels of tension, elevate and stabilize mood, improve sleep and improve self-esteem," note the experts at the Anxiety and Depression Association of

America.

9. Breathe deep. There are many therapeutic breathing techniques, but the key is to focus on each breath, which will naturally take your mind off of things that may be causing you anxiety. The simplest is yoga's sama vritti, or "equal breath." Take air in through the nose for four counts, then exhale through the nose for four counts. Repeat until the tension dissipates.

10. Don't overreact. How often do we worry about things that never come to pass? One study puts the figure at 85 percent. And when the subjects' fears came true, a vast majority of them found that the catastrophe wasn't as bad as they imagined or offered valuable life lessons that tempered the problem. "Very few events really change the trajectory of your life," notes New York psychiatrist Dr. Drew Ramsey. {eo}

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