

Anxiety: The naturopathic approach

Anxiety is the uneasy feeling of impending danger or dread that can last minutes or even days. There is a biological response within the body, part of the fight or flight response, that causes a variety of physical symptoms that one will experience.

We have all experienced some type of anxiety at one point or another in our life, anything from a nervous stomach before a test or increased heart rate before going into an important interview. These are all normal reactions for the situation. It is when these feelings are experienced multiple times a day that it can start to have a negative impact.

Pathological anxiety is the constant experience of worrying and being concerned about one or a variety of different things. It is this constant state of worrying that can have a detrimental effect on an individual's health.

Signs and symptoms

When we are in a state of anxiety, the brain sends signals that change the function of a variety of organs and produces the following symptoms:

- Sweat glands are stimulated causing increased perspiration
- Pupils dilate
- The liver releases glucose into the blood increasing blood sugar levels
- Decreases digestive function
- Constricts blood flow to the periphery
- Reduces blood flow to the abdomen
- Increases heart rate
- Reduces salivation causing a dry mouth
- Hyperventilation

Causes of anxiety

Our bodies were never meant to maintain an anxious state for any length of time. It is this constant state of arousal that makes us feel unwell and then can cause health complaints. There are certain health problems that are related to long-term anxiety, in order to resolve the health complaint we need to reduce the anxiety within the body.

Anxiety can be the cause of a number of conditions including:

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Panic Attacks
- Headaches
- Muscle Tension
- High Blood Pressure
- Indigestion
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Sexual dysfunction
- Peptic Ulcer
- Cardiac Arrhythmia
- Failure to Ovulate
- Constipation and Diarrhoea



Without effectively treating the anxiety the body will never be brought back into balance. It is very important to support and have the nervous system functioning at its optimum to ensure long-term health.

Why am I anxious?

Now it is also very important to understand that there can be a physiological cause to why a person is anxious.

- Hormonal Imbalances - PMS, menopause and post labour
- Nutritional Deficiencies
- Amino Acid Deficiencies
- Heavy Metal Toxicity
- Hyperthyroidism
- Hypoglycaemia
- Excessive lactate production
- High caffeine consumption
- Chronic alcohol consumption

It is important to find the cause behind the anxiety, as this will guide us to the most effective treatment options.

Effective Treatments

Amino Acid and Nutritional deficiencies

One key point to understand how the nervous system works is within our brain/body we use chemical messengers called neurotransmitters to send information from one place in the body to another. When these neurotransmitters are out of balance a person can suffer from anxiety. The main neurotransmitters we use are Serotonin, Dopamine, GABA, Glutamate, Noradrenaline, Opioids and Histamine. Now many of the orthodox medications prescribed for anxiety have an effect on one or more of these neurotransmitters, however the medications tend to work by suppressing normal bodily function, this is why when a person comes off of these medications the symptoms return as the problem was never fixed just covered up. From a naturopathic perspective I want to improve and support normal bodily function to help reduce the anxiety. I do this by providing supplements that contain the amino acid precursors to the neurotransmitters as well as the appropriate vitamins that are required to ensure effective production and break down of your neurotransmitters. There is also an effective blood test that I can refer you for to help determine your particular deficiency.

- B Vitamins are required for the synthesis of many of our neurotransmitters
- SAMe also improves neurotransmitter synthesis
- Magnesium is used by the body in incredibly high amounts when there is excessive nervous stimulation and supplementation can have a profound relaxing effect on the nervous system
- Amino Acids such as glutamine, tryptophan, phenylalanine tyrosine and histidine are used as a supplement to provide the body with the raw materials it needs to synthesis adequate amounts of our neurotransmitters. It is best to have a qualified practitioner determine which amino acid supplementation is needed as it can be different from person to person.



Hormonal Imbalances

This treatment protocol is for women who suffer from PMT and their anxiety is worse prior to menstruation.

Chaste Tree: is an incredibly powerful herb that helps to establish effective oestrogen and progesterone ratio as well as increasing dopamine levels

Activated B6: helps to maintain an effective oestrogen and progesterone ratio

Fibre: helps to increase intestinal clearance of oestrogen

Heavy Metal Toxicity

A hair and mineral analysis would need to be done to determine which heavy metals are in excess within the body. Then the appropriate nutritional chelators can be used to slowly and safely remove the high doses of heavy metals. Only to be done under the supervision of a health professional.

Dietary and lifestyle advice

- Avoid all forms of caffeine (tea, coffee): caffeine has a very stimulating effect on the nervous system and can be the cause or exacerbate anxiety
- Avoid alcohol as it has a negative effect on neurotransmitter levels and function
- Avoid MSG: often found in pre-packaged food and Chinese food
- Make sure to eat breakfast and eat every 4 hrs as this will help to balance your blood sugar levels.
- Have a source of protein with each of your meals (red meat, chicken, pork, eggs, fish, nuts, seeds, tofu, lentils, beans or peas)
- Avoid artificial colours, preservatives and flavourings
- Avoid sugar and foods with high quantities of added sugar
- Get regular exercise

© Laura Butler, 2010

For more about Laura, please see her page: www.naturalhealthfertility.com/Laura.html

