

Natural Treatments to Relieve Anxiety and OCD

An ACN Report



Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT)

CBT is one of the most effective means of controlling anxious and intrusive thoughts, as experienced with obsessions and compulsions. Research shows that children can be taught to “challenge” their anxious or excessive thoughts by being taught to better understand what is taking place. Not a full answer, study results are encouraging. Many are not aware of this method, and it is not always easy to find a practitioner. See www.worrywisekids.org and click on resources to find practitioners.

Diet and beverages

You’ve heard it again and again—eat a balanced diet filled with nutrient rich foods. Well—it’s important, especially for nervous system disorders. If you experience anxiety and/or OCD, reduce your sugars and simple carbohydrates (donuts, white pasta and bread) and eat whole grain, natural foods. Include protein at every meal. Be sure to eat high-protein snacks if you notice you tend to crash or bottom out during the day. Hypoglycemia has been linked to anxiety and OCD, and you need to keep your blood sugar level steady to avoid setting off reactions. It’s not surprising that caffeine can also add to anxiety, whether it’s present in tea, coffee, or soft drinks. Switch to noncaffeinated versions. For coffees, look for the Swiss water extraction method. Most decaf sold has been through chemical processing to remove the caffeine, and you should avoid that. Of course, soft drinks should also be avoided, in general.

Proper Rest

It's ideal to get a good night's sleep, but if you are anxious or mentally fighting intrusive thoughts, it's more difficult to fall asleep and have an uninterrupted rest. A vicious cycle often ensues, with worry about lack of sleeping adding to your stress.

Natural supplements

Use of natural herbal supplements to relax can be helpful.

- Studies suggest that GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), which is an amino acid and acts much like a neurotransmitter helps reduce stress. It is often low in people with anxiety and depression. It should not be taken with some medications, so be sure to speak to your health care practitioner before taking it. GABA is available in natural food stores.
- L-tryptophan can also promote sleep. It is manufactured by Craig Nutraceuticals (do a Google search for suppliers). 5 HTP (5-Hydroxytryptophan) works similarly to tryptophan and they are both converted to serotonin, which aids sleep. Check with an expert in nutritional therapy for a recommendation on taking these, and other nutritional cofactors. There can be interactions with antidepressants and other drugs and you should check with a professional.
- The herb valerian has been proven helpful for sleep, but safety studies on long term use had not been fully evaluated and there is some concern about possible toxicity in long term use. It can be used on an as needed basis—with breaks. You will find teas, supplements, and extracts at a natural food store. Kava is also used by many, but concerns about possible detrimental effects on the liver have not been fully resolved, and care should be taken to use it sparingly. It is always important to inform your doctor if you are taking or wish to take herbs.
- Before sleep, play relaxing music or read spiritual material (not a mystery novel!) rather than watch television or engage in controversial discussions.

Other supplements

- In addition to the supplements and herbs mentioned above for sleep and relaxation, various vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, and other amino acid imbalances could be affecting the nervous system. While it is impossible to give recommended dosages and lists of nutrients that will apply to everyone, an adequate amount of the B vitamins is crucial. Research suggests that inositol, one of the B vitamins, can be very useful for OCD.
- When conducting amino acid therapy, it is often advisable to conduct an amino acid analysis (i.e. see www.doctorsdata.com) and request a recommended balanced protocol from the laboratory. A compounding pharmacy can prepare a blended supplement specifically for your needs. Staff at the laboratory can advise you on compounding.
- A comprehensive mineral analysis can also be helpful by giving you information that ensures you don't take a supplement that will create further imbalances. Magnesium and calcium are known for their muscle relaxing properties.
- We are learning that essential fatty acids (EFAs) play a key role in many medical conditions, and this includes central nervous system disorders. Ideally, you would consult a nutritional expert to advise you on administration and monitor results. Tell your doctor if you are taking EFAs because some side effects can occur, particularly blood thinning with large doses of omega 3 (in fish oil). Some EFAs can also increase the effectiveness of certain medications, requiring a dose adjustment. Sometimes people experiment with different types of EFAs (fish oil, flax oil, walnut oil, etc.) but laboratory testing can help clarify the picture to achieve the best balance for you. . The clinical laboratory at Kennedy Krieger Institute, Baltimore, Maryland is highly regarded.
- In addition to the above, ask your nutritional advisor about the possible need for SAMe (helps some, makes some people temporarily worse until discontinued; used instead of tryptophan or 5-HTP).
- Other nutritional factors may also be involved.

Exercise, massage therapy, and relaxation

Exercise is another commonsense effort for reducing anxiety! Find an activity that's

enjoyable for you, or you won't stick with it. Walk with a friend, get a workout tape you like, join a gym that's close to home or work—whatever works best for your situation. Massage seems like a luxury, but when your health and mental well being are involved, it may be worth the expense. (Even use of a massage chair has shown beneficial results!) Schedule relaxation time during the day, even if just for short intervals. Give your mind and body a break. Make time for some “fun” in what is often a stress-packed day.

Meditation, deep breathing exercises, and other relaxation methods

There are a number of meditation methods that can reduce stress and anxiety. Initially, it will be difficult to sit with a still mind, or concentrate on a mantra, but with time the habit will work to your advantage. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce anxiety—not surprising because with this meditation you strive to live in the moment, and not worry about the past or the future. Just because it's a simple concept doesn't mean it's not powerful. Progressive relaxation of muscle areas of the body, listening to peaceful music, tai chi, and yoga help some people.

Biofeedback

EEG biofeedback or neurofeedback, is an established treatment for anxiety. Use for OCD is more experimental. See www.eegspectrum.com. The good news is that our understanding of these disorders now allows for better treatments without the use of drugs. A comprehensive approach would be ideal, addressing life style, diet, supplements, and behavioral therapy.

The nonprofit Association for Comprehensive Therapy (ACN) publishes the website *Latitudes.org*. ACN focuses on finding and sharing advanced and natural therapies for neurological conditions.