



“Worry doesn’t take away tomorrow’s troubles, it takes away today’s peace”

Product of the Month:

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Anxious about Anxiety?

Dr. Alison on Anxiety

By Dr. Alison Kerns, ND

Anxiety is one of the most common psychologically diagnosed conditions today. Both anxiety and fear are considered negatively-valenced emotions. Fear is brief, present focused, due to a specific threat, and allows for avoidance of that threat. On the other hand, anxiety is future focused, characterized by sustained hyper-arousal due to uncertainty and aids in defensive action or risk assessment. Anxiety is specifically defined as persistent, excessive, and unrealistic worry about everyday occurrences.

Symptoms of anxiety include but are not limited to nervousness, difficulty concentrating, trouble relaxing, tenseness, hyper-vigilance, restlessness, and irritability. When experiencing anxiety, it is imperative to rule-out frank disease such as a myocardial infarction, Grave’s disease, or pheochromocytoma. Acute anxiety, or panic attacks, may be related to chronic viral fatigue syndrome, a vitamin and/or mineral deficiency, or PTSD.

Both anxiety and fear are normal emotions that are experienced by all individuals, however, when they become excessive or triggered inappropriately, they form the basis of anxiety disorders.

Some anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) are characterized by excessive anxiety. However, other anxiety disorders are characterized, at least in part, by excessive and inappropriate fear, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), specific phobias, and social anxiety disorder.

The amygdala, made up of almond shaped groups of nuclei found near the base of your brain, is central to processing both fear and anxiety. Emotional memories are stored in a central part of the amygdala and thus may play a role in anxiety disorders and phobias. The exact pathophysiology of anxiety disorders is not fully understood, but it is thought to be related to the dysregulation of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, and GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) in the Central Nervous System.

The cause of anxiety can be varied and includes but is not limited to chronic stress, caffeine, alcohol abuse, and medications such as benzodiazepenes. There has also been shown to be a strong genetic tendency towards anxiety found in families. In correlation, there has been recent research exploring epigenetics, the reversible and heritable alterations in genomic expression that are

independent of changes in gene sequence. Epigenetic research bridges the gap between our external environmental exposures (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) and the pathophysiology that produces mood, anxiety, and fear.

Chronic anxiety can be a result of being under continual stress due to emotional, physical, or mental trauma or food allergies/intolerances, heavy metals, pathogens, or any biochemical imbalances. These various stressors activate a rapid response from our Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS), or a “fight-or-flight” response, as well as a slower response from our HPA (Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal) axis to produce cortisol. Cortisol released into your blood triggers your body to release glucose, which can thus be readily used by your body’s brain and muscles to help fight or flee the impending danger. Over time, chronic constant stress yields an over stimulated SNS as well as “adrenal exhaustion”. This will worsen anxiety and may also cause insomnia, heart racing, decreased digestive function, and other hormonal imbalances.

It is imperative to work with your healthcare provider to find out the underlying cause of your anxiety and to begin your journey towards healing.

Dr. Alison Kerns has had great early success as AIM’s newest associate. Her patients love her and her work ethic is second to none. Come experience primary care with this excellent doctor.

Anxiety: An Imbalance of the Heart

By Nichole Santoro, LAc

In Chinese Medicine we always strive to uncover and treat the root imbalance causing a disease. So, in thinking about treating an emotion like anxiety it is important to view the whole health picture of the person to establish if anxiety is the byproduct of a different disease or deeper emotion or - or if it is, in fact, a primary problem.

Anxiety can manifest for anyone at any time for a plethora of reasons. We can all relate to that internal continuum between ease and anxiety. In some cases though, anxiety is a main issue. In extreme cases, anxiety symptoms as intense as heart palpitations, ringing in the ears and a feeling of doom can be debilitating.

Chinese Medicine recognizes the heart as the primary organ out of balance. There are many patterns of disharmony that could result in the same symptom picture that is known as anxiety, but we mainly see two types in our clinic.

The two majors patterns of disharmony that produce anxiety can be generalized into an excess or a deficient pattern:

Heart Blood Deficiency

This deficient type of anxiety is accompanied by other symptoms such as low energy, poor memory and focus, excessive worry or thinking, difficulty falling asleep and poor digestion. These people often tend to feel cold and have a pale tongue.

Traditional Chinese doctors talk about the blood being able to anchor the spirit. What is meant by this, is that when the blood is replete in vitamins and minerals- because digestion is up to par and the diet is good- the nutrition in the blood literally has a calming effect on the mind and spirit. Good quality fats, B-vitamins and iron are especially nourishing and grounding when present in plentiful quantity for our tissues to use. It is like firing on all cylinders!

Treatment principle: *Nourish the Blood and Tonify the Qi to Calm the Spirit.*

Addressing the digestion for optimizing absorption of nutrients and building the blood with herbs and good food choices is the key to treating this type of anxiety. Acupuncture and moxibustion are used to energize the organs of digestion, plus calm the nerves and settle the mind.

Heart Fire

This excess type of anxiety is more charged with other strong emotions such as anger and frustration. People suffering from this anxiety are usually also stressed or have very demanding lives/careers. They also may feel warmer, have a red tongue, vivid dreams and wake frequently or early in the morning.

Treatment for this pattern of anxiety should be focused more on stress reduction, lifestyle adjustments, meditation, deep breathing and optimizing sleep patterns. Acupuncture and Herbs are used to clear heat and calm the nerves

When anxiety can be understood not so much as a mental illness, but more of a physical or lifestyle imbalance that disturbs the spirit causing an extreme feeling of mental unease, it makes it easier to tackle and start addressing the source of the problem. It also takes the stigma out of it as a mental condition. Our physical body and its general state of health absolutely has an effect on our mind and personality! The hormones running through our veins, the quality of food we eat, the amount of love and fun we have - all makes a difference in the makeup of our blood and has an effect on how grounded we feel and how comfortable we are in our own skin. As with any symptom, anxiety is a clue that there is something out of balance with the life we are living. We should view all symptoms as formal invitations to examine ourselves and find our way back to health and back to our destiny path.



Spotlight on Lavender

Lavender is an herb that has proven to be effective by leading researchers as a natural remedy for treating anxiety. It is known for its distinct fragrance, and its relaxing effects are linked to physiological effects of the volatile oils on our limbic system. Recent studies have also started looking at the effects of Lavender oil when ingested. At therapeutic dose, Lavender has actually shown to be comparable and even superior to the pharmaceutical drug lorazepam (Ativan) in treating generalized anxiety disorder. Furthermore, lavender oil produces no sedative effects and has no potential for drug abuse or dependence. Many scientific studies have confirmed the anti-anxiety properties of lavender as well as highlighted other medicinal benefits, including: aiding sleep, mild depression and pain relief. *Here are some easy ways to start incorporating Lavender into your everyday life!*

- * **Lavender tea:** steep 1-2 Tbsp. of lavender flowers per cup of boiling water for 15 minutes.
- * **Lavender bath:** Add 12-15 drops of lavender essential oil and 1 cup of Epsom salt to your bath water
- * **Lavender pillow:** Put a few Tbsp. of lavender flowers in a cheesecloth bundle and stash in your pillow for a relaxing aroma all night long. Change flowers every month.