

Getting to the Root of Anxiety

According to Zion Market Research, the global anxiety disorder market is expected to surge at a steady rate in the coming years, due, at least in part, to the COVID-19 pandemic. This forecast is no surprise, and it's due to more than the pandemic. Social unrest, which is both a symptom and a cause of anxiety, is also a big driver, as are the 24/7 cycle of bad news and negativity and the constant stimulation delivered by electronic devices and social media.

In this world of increased connectivity, we here at BioDesign Wellness Center see people struggling more and more with isolation, relationship and family conflict, financial strain, and uncertainty. Others we see are suffering from *generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)* – ongoing anxiety about a variety of issues – which may have started with an early childhood trauma. And marriage, raising children, and dealing with uncomfortable situations at work haven't become any less stressful over the years.



Conventional treatment for anxiety typically involves psychotherapy and anti-anxiety medications. Psychotherapy can do wonders. Addressing stressful relationships and situations, training the brain to follow healthier thought patterns, and developing more effective communication and problem-solving skills can all help to reduce stress and anxiety naturally. Medication can be helpful as a temporary solution or to provide quick symptomatic relief when the anxiety is intense or overwhelming, but medication alone is generally thought to be only a partial solution and is potentially dangerous.

Identifying and Treating Root Causes

Here at BioDesign Wellness Center, a [Tampa functional medicine](#) practice, we work closely with patients who struggle with chronic illness – including anxiety – to identify and address all possible root causes, including stressful relationships and

situations but also diet, lifestyle, and environmental factors that may be outside any individual's control. Here are some of our areas of focus that may be overlooked by conventional medical and/or mental health practices:

- **Functional hypoglycemia:** Diet habits can create or contribute to hypoglycemia, which is often undiagnosed or misunderstood. Lab results rarely reveal hypoglycemia unless it is severe, or the patient has diabetes. If you are irritable or feel lightheaded between meals, you are likely functionally hypoglycemic. (**Tip:** *Eating too much sugar or carbs or not enough carbs will aggravate hypoglycemia.*)
- **Burn out:** When you have been under stress for long periods of time, your body turns to adrenaline as a source of energy. Adrenaline will cause you to sleep poorly and intensify anxiety.
- **Excessive exercise:** Over-training increases adrenaline and can result in burnout/anxiety. A healthy balance of cardiovascular exercise, weight training, and rest can help you meet your fitness goals without increasing anxiety.
- **Stimulants:** Caffeine, nicotine, and some ingredients in energy drinks can make you feel jittery or anxious. Limiting consumption of caffeine and other stimulants can help to reduce anxiety over time.
- **Hypersensitive stress response system:** Chronic stress leads to an overworked hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which is responsible for regulating the fight-flight-or-freeze response. This can cause a host of problems, including suppressed immune response, weight issues, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mood disorders, and cognitive decline. It can also lead to an oversensitive HPA axis, which may contribute to anxiety.

We follow specific protocols to help support the HPA axis to reset the body's stress response.

- **Environmental toxins:** The body is equipped to remove and eliminate toxins, but our environment has become so toxic that the body often cannot keep up without the proper support. Mold (in water-damaged buildings) is one of the worst and most common culprits, triggering the release of many inflammatory chemicals that are absorbed into the brain creating neuro-inflammation often to the basal ganglia and limbic system, resulting in anxiety, fatigue, and/or depression. The parts of your brain responsible for coping, emotions, and decision-making can spin out of control, contributing to anxiety. This is more common than many doctors and patients are aware of. Reducing exposure to environmental toxins and following a medically supervised detox protocol supports the body's own detox mechanisms.

Treating Anxiety with Supplements

In addition to identifying and treating the root causes of anxiety, we may also prescribe vitamins, minerals, and other supplements to support the body's ability to control anxiety and to provide symptomatic relief:

- **Vitamin and mineral repletion:** Many vitamins and minerals support the body's ability to manufacture healthy levels of neurotransmitters, such as Gaba, which calms the nervous system, allowing for sleep and feeling at ease, and serotonin, which makes us feel happy and supports restful sleep.
- **Ashwagandha:** Researchers in Australia and India recently studied the effects of ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) extract on 60 healthy but stressed individuals. Participants were assessed via the Hamilton Anxiety Rating

Scale (HAM-A) and blood markers of the stress response, including serum cortisol and DHEA-S, along with serum testosterone. Results indicated a statistically significant 41-percent drop in the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), a 23-percent reduction in cortisol, and an 8-percent decrease in DHEA-S. In males, an 11-percent increase in serum testosterone was noted in the ashwagandha group.

- **L-Theanine:** L-theanine is a unique amino acid found in tea (particularly high in green tea) and widely consumed around the world. L-theanine has been reported to modulate alpha brain-wave activity and improve attention in EEG studies, as well as benefit the mental state overall. Results from a recent double-blind, placebo-controlled study on 30 participants confirms these benefits. The L-theanine group had decreased scores for stress-related symptoms, as well as reduction in sleep latency, sleep disturbance, and use of sleep medication. Scores for verbal fluency and executive function were also improved in the L-theanine group.

Anxiety is not necessarily a bad thing. It is part of the body's messaging system, letting us know when something is not right in our lives. But when it becomes chronic or excessive and is beginning to affect our ability to function and feel our best, it needs to be addressed.

Whether the source of your anxiety is a relationship issue, an ongoing problem, a difficult situation, unproductive thinking patterns, or some underlying physical dysfunction, we may be able help you sort out what's going on and obtain the treatment and guidance necessary to address the root causes of your anxiety and get you back on the path to feeling healthier and more at ease. If you'd like to learn more or schedule a confidential consultation, please call our patient experience

manager, Lori, at (813) 445-7770.

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