

HABITS TO BEAT STRESS AND ANXIETY



Stress and anxiety are two of the most common mental health issues worldwide, with an estimated 40 million adults suffering in the US alone. [\(1\)](#) Many people think that stress begins with a high intensity experience, but most cases of prolonged stress and anxiety actually begin with little things that slowly accumulate until they finally break you down. This is typically called 'burnout.'

While there are certainly cases where it is caused by one intense event or experience, most times it isn't that abrupt. Sadly, it isn't always treated properly or effectively.

When experiencing stress or anxiety, many people will turn to activities like alcohol consumption or drug abuse in order to cope rather than understanding what they're going through and how to treat it naturally.

Not only can this type of coping lead to further health problems in the form of addiction, but it also doesn't actually treat the source of stress or anxiety. While these are certainly coping mechanisms that can improve your mood when performed in moderation, they will absolutely not solve the problem long term.

Many people believe that meditation is a great way to relieve stress and anxiety [\(2\)](#) because it's easy to do anywhere, at any time. However, many

people who practice this activity tend to think about other things while meditating which counteracts its purpose. If you wish to properly meditate to relieve stress and anxiety, you will find it useful to learn mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness meditation focuses on breathing techniques that bring awareness to your current emotional state by focusing on your senses, thoughts, emotions, and what is happening around you simultaneously. Think of it as living in the moment so there is no past nor future focus. By doing this activity for 5-20 minutes once or twice a day it can significantly reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.

As far as eating habits go, some foods can cause the body to mimic the feelings you get when you are anxious. For example, the caffeine in coffee can increase your heartbeat and make you feel fidgety. Caffeine also interferes with how well you sleep. If you are shattered from lack of quality sleep you will not be able to cope with the stresses of the day which can lead to anxiety.

Anxiety that could be significantly reduced just for the sake of a decent night's sleep. Another thing that can help prevent feelings of stress and anxiety is eating small amounts throughout the day rather than one large meal at dinner time. This is because it keeps your blood sugar levels constant

the day. This means that you have a steady supply of energy to cope with what the day throws at you.

Additionally, if you don't eat enough and allow your blood sugar to go too low you can feel sluggish and tired. Your brain needs fuel (from food) to function properly. A lack of fuel means the brain cannot produce the hormones that control emotions. This can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety and make you cranky. Ever heard the term 'hangry?' Well now you know what it is and why you feel that way when you don't eat enough. Many foods specifically help us feel better. The obvious ones are those that we crave such as sugary or fatty foods like cake and chips.

But these only make us feel better short term and are not actually very good for our well-being long term. The foods we need to keep feelings of anxiety at bay are those that support the brain and its important functions. These foods include oily fish [\(3\)](#), green vegetables [\(4\)](#), whole grain carbs and berries. [\(5\)](#) When you don't eat a healthy diet, you are not firing on all cylinders which leads to you making mistakes, not sleeping properly, not being able to concentrate and many more things can lead to stress. It may be boring to eat healthy foods but you will feel better long term both in terms of anxiety and your overall health. Win Win!

Another way to beat stress and anxiety with what you put into your mouth is by making sure there are lots of 'good' bacteria in your gut. There has been a lot of research recently that has identified the fact that these bacteria are part of the process of manufacturing the hormones that make us feel calm, relaxed and even happy. [\(6\)](#)

These hormones are mimicked in anti-depressant medication to ease feelings of anxiety, stress and depression. But how much better is it to get them into your body in a natural way, rather than chemical drugs? Drugs that are supposed to help you feel better but often list anxiety, depression and even suicide as potential side effects [\(7\)](#).

Another important thing is getting plenty of exercise during the week whether it's running, jogging, weight lifting, etc. Not only does this activity give you more energy throughout your day but also reduces feelings of stress because it gives you a productive way to deal with those negative emotions rather than bottling them up inside until they explode. [\(8\)](#) This is one of the best ways to get rid of stress and anxiety for good, however it's important that you're still able to sleep well at night.

Sleeping well at night can be difficult for many reasons but lack of sleep means you start the day feeling tired, which will worsen feelings of anxiety. Being on the back foot all day, struggling to concentrate and potentially making mistakes that can lead to situations that make you feel even more

stressed and anxious. This could potentially be life threatening especially if you are driving and lose concentration.

Lack of sleep can make anxiety worse [\(9\)](#). Unfortunately, not being able to sleep is something people with anxiety suffer from, so this can make matters worse. [\(10\)](#)

To get good restorative sleep it is best to get into a regular routine. Go to bed in a dark room without cell phones, tablets or television. Try to go to bed at the same time each night, eat the last meal of the day no less than two hours before bedtime and give yourself time to wind down in the evenings. When you are asleep the body does some biological house-keeping including clearing away the build-up of hormones that cause anxiety [\(11\)](#).

Finally, the habit that will probably help you most in life is practicing gratitude every day. When you are worried and upset it is sometimes hard to realise all that is good in your life. Gratitude for your ability to see and hear things others can't, or for your sense of taste when enjoying a meal with friends and family. Not only are these things simple pleasures of life, but they're also taken for granted by many people who have them until something happens that makes them appreciate it more. This reaction of spending time being grateful for all the simple pleasures in life not only reduces feelings of stress but increases serotonin levels which leads to better quality sleep as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, practicing gratitude allows us to have a better appreciation for all the little joys in our life.

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