

BioBites: Stress & Anxiety

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Stress & Anxiety: Overview

What is Stress? Stress is a physical, emotional, or mental reaction to various conditions, changes, or demands in life. It is a natural part of life; without stress, humanity wouldn't have survived to this point in our evolution. Stress affects people in different ways and is rooted in the sympathetic nervous system's fight or flight response. Though stress may cause discomfort, we don't want a situation of no stress; instead, we want eustress (optimal amount), which supports creativity, problem-solving, change, and satisfaction.

Stress & the Nervous System. Stress has a direct impact on the peripheral nervous system, which includes the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The sympathetic nervous system interacts with many parts of the body that we can identify as relating to/ producing symptoms of stress. The parasympathetic nervous system is our system for "rest and digest". When we're not resting or digesting, we're in a sympathetic state. Stress and the sympathetic system allow us to focus on and respond to what's happening around us. It is recommended that humans spend 40% of the day in parasympathetic mode (meals and sleep) and 60% in sympathetic. It's important we make sure we're able to get the body to enter the parasympathetic (support rest/digestion).

The Gut-Brain Connection. What's happening in the digestive system has a lot to do with what's happening in the nervous system. We need healthy flora in the gut to have a healthy nervous system. People who report anxiety frequently report gastrointestinal (GI) problems, as well.

Anxiety. Anxiety is common for everyone - from birth through all stages of life. It is the most prevalent mental disorder in the US affecting almost 1 in 3 people at some time in life. Anxiety is a normal emotion. In its healthy form, it allows us to perform at peak levels. Butterflies in the stomach, for instance, suggests you're adapting to meet the demands that circumstances require to succeed. Problems arise when anxiety goes on and on, beyond one specific event. There are many conditions that fall under the heading of anxiety, affecting a large number of people for a large number of reasons. Negative thinking is a significant contributor to anxiety; some estimates suggest 87% of human self-talk is negative and only 13% is positive. There are other factors: genetic, biochemical, changes to the environment, food and exercise, and drugs. There are many symptoms and many ways to treat anxiety.

Anxiety and the Gut & Nervous Systems. The foods that you eat have an impact on whether you can manage anxiety or overcome it. Getting a healthy dose of prebiotics and probiotics (fermented) foods is an important part of caring for the gut-brain connection. Prebiotic-rich foods include: artichokes, onions, chicory, garlic, leeks, bananas, fruit, soybeans, asparagus, honey, maple syrup, green tea, legumes, peas, yogurt, etc. There are also nutraceuticals we can take to support - top is Vitamin B complex (DT recommends everyone takes this one). Magnesium and calcium are also supportive of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system; zinc and potassium, too. Other nutraceuticals that help manage anxiety include: 5-HTP, fish oil, flax oil, chia seeds, Vitamin C, Ashwagandha, Kava Kava root, passiflora, lemon balm, valerian, lavender, chamomile essential oil, bergamot essential oil.

Managing Stress. There are many ways to manage stress; attitude is among the most significant. If you think that stress is terrible and bad; you're more likely to experience the negative effects to the body. Every day, we need to focus on the following: cultivating positive thinking, avoiding negative thoughts and behaviors, walking/physical activity, meditation, prayer, getting adequate sleep, laughter, practicing self love, and eating the proper foods. In a therapeutic office, the following are also available: neurofeedback, sound table, massage, structural energetic therapy.

Q&A Synopsis

Is it problematic to use Valerian too much? Yes, it's problematic to use anything too much. Valerian as an herbal product can be overdone. The idea behind using most herbs/vitamins is to support the consumer as he/she addresses health concerns while making other life adjustments. If the user is still taking this after 5-6 months, underlying issues are not likely being addressed.

What are ways we can reduce stress after a stressful call or encounter? Watch something funny, go for a walk, talk to a friend. Laughter, movement and slow deep breathing are among the most important. Finally, the opposite of cortisol is oxytocin, which is stimulated by hugging, touching, or sitting close to someone; oxytocin is a powerful stress reliever.

Can someone be so stressed that he/she doesn't know what it is to not be stressed? YES, and this is common. When you're in a state of sympathetic dominance so long, you don't know what it's like to relax. Having difficulty sitting/doing "nothing" can be a sign of sympathetic dominance.

What are some ways to counteract negative self-talk? Journaling is a great tool. Take out a piece of paper and start writing. Write with your nondominant hand, which forces you to use the other side of your brain. This is a great way to force you out of your current head space. Use paper and pen or pencil, not a computer.

Ignatia and Nat Mur. Homeopathic ignatia is commonly used to support persons in the face of sudden grief and/ or hysteria. Ignatia is probably the number one remedy that people start with, but it should also be followed by other remedies to support the specific situation. Nat mur is among those that commonly follows.

Can my stress and anxiety be the cause of low white blood count? Indirectly. Stress is written about with many different conditions, the number one being heart disease. Heart disease is correlated with stress because stress causes vasoconstriction. Obesity, headaches, digestive disorders, memory problems, insomnia, rapid aging can also be symptomatic of stress. Stress contributes to these imbalances in other organ systems that can lead to low white blood cell count. Autoimmune disease can also lead to low wbc count; and stress can lead to chronic autoimmune disease.

What can be done about high anxiety causing high blood pressure? Focus on positive thinking and having fun. People have lost the ability to enjoy themselves without overindulging. People can even over-exercise, which is another form of stress. Blood pressure is typically thought to be a cardiac or kidney issue, but DT finds that most problems with blood pressure are nervous system-related.

What are some examples of negative thinking? Negative thinking can be described as always looking at the glass as half empty rather than half full. "Why did this person cut me off?" "Why is it raining today?" "Why can't my kids be better?" "Why do I have to go to work today?" A lot of

self talk is “woe is me”. We need to accept that much of life involves things happening, whether we want them to or not. Cultivating resilience and an ability to look at the glass half full is beneficial for our health, particularly when it comes to stress and anxiety.

How do you see body work, such as massage, acupuncture, or fascial release, fitting into stress management?

We tend to think of massage as deep tissue; but more appropriate for stress is lymphatic massage. When we're under a lot of stress and our muscles constrict and becoming tight, we constrict lymph flow. The lymphatic system clears waste products from the body. The whole idea of massage is to move the lymph, get better blood flow, and achieve a parasympathetic state, which is part of stress management. There are therapies that support this, too, for example, the soundbed, where you lay on a waterbed-like table with headphones on. There is a specific frequency of the body; by putting that frequency into a sound that can be listened to, the body can be exposed to an energetic wave that relaxes the body. These therapies are about rebalancing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. In Biomed, health problems are reflective of energetic imbalance. These methods, in addition to meditation, prayer, reiki, etc. can help re-balance and up-regulate the parasympathetic system.

What commonalities do you see in patients who are resilient to stress and how can we develop resilience?

We have to have stress in our body to perform optimally. How do we get there? The number one thing is attitude. How do you perceive stress in your life? How we respond to this question has a lot to do with learned perceptions. Our learned perceptions come from our parents and the people we were around until we left that childhood environment. What you have to learn is: stress happens, how are you going to deal with it in the short term and long term? Changing our attitude is a great long-term solution. According to DT, the patients who do the best in terms of health outcomes have a very positive attitude.

CBD/THC and Sleep. CBD has become very popular; it has provided a lot of support to people, including those in need support with sleep. For many, however, it becomes a crutch, which means we're not addressing the root problem. CBD is a natural product that has been around for a very long time. It can be great in the short term as you continue to search and add positive elements into your life.

Probiotics. It's only in the last 20 years that we've started to appreciate how important probiotics are. In our gut are 2-4 pounds of gut bacteria. They're responsible for 70% of our immune system. Because stress decreases blood flow to the gut, it can contribute to an imbalance in the flora; eating the wrong foods also creates dysbiosis - imbalance in the flora. Probiotics can help replenish the flora in our gut. They are recommended as part of an everyday diet/supplement regimen and can be found in many foods (miso, sauerkraut, kombucha, pickled foods, etc.). An average adult should take between 25-50 billion per day in a capsule; a child 15-20 billion per day, on average.

How do you train the nervous system to be in the parasympathetic more?

Take the 21-Day Challenge. It takes about three weeks to make something a habit. We're trying to incorporate simple habits - drinking enough water, doing positive things for yourself. When you don't fight your survival instincts, you reduce the load you're putting on the body to survive. You get into the parasympathetic by calming down your nervous system.