

Four Causes of Anxiety

Suffering from anxiety is like being held prisoner in a place where worry infuses every thought, your heart pounds, and the world seems jarring and disorienting. With anti-anxiety medications among the most commonly prescribed drugs in the United States, Americans are clearly suffering. Though medications relieve the symptoms, they don't address the cause.

Some causes of anxiety are obvious: stimulants such as caffeine, weight loss pills, energy drinks, or supplements that increase energy. Psychological or emotional stressors, such as having to speak in public or prepare for a major exam, can also bring on bouts of anxiety.

Below are a few lesser-known causes of anxiety.

GAD autoimmunity and anxiety

GAD stands for glutamic acid decarboxylase, an enzyme that triggers production of the brain's primary calming chemical, called GABA. Some people develop an autoimmune reaction to GAD, which means their immune system erroneously attacks and destroys it. As a result, they can't make enough GABA to calm the brain and anxiety goes up. GAD autoimmunity is also linked to obsessive compulsive disorder, motion sickness, vertigo, facial tics, and other symptoms. GAD autoimmunity is more common in those with gluten sensitivity or celiac disease and a gluten-free diet can alleviate symptoms.

Gluten and anxiety

Gluten has other links to anxiety. It's hard to believe something as innocent as your morning toast or a bowl of spaghetti could cause anxiety, but recent research shows that is the case for many people with Celiac or other gluten sensitivities. Gluten has been shown to trigger inflammation in the brain and autoimmune attacks against brain tissue, which can cause anxiety. Although a gluten-free diet is an important first step, many people find they also need to eliminate other foods such as dairy, eggs, or other grains to dampen immune flare-ups and anxiety. An anti-inflammatory autoimmune diet is a good beginning to address brain health.

Blood sugar imbalances and anxiety

It's amazing how many chronic health issues stem from a blood sugar imbalance caused by eating a high-carbohydrate diet. Every time you eat too many carbs in the way of breads, pasta, rice, potatoes, desserts, pastries, soda or sweet coffee drinks you send blood sugar and insulin surging and crashing. When this happens daily it can create a multitude of neurological symptoms, including anxiety, depression, mood swings, irritability, and fatigue. Skipping meals and drinking too much coffee also feeds this cycle. A lower-carb, whole foods diet with enough healthy proteins and fats can keep energy on an even keel and tame anxiety.

Unmanaged Hashimoto's hypothyroidism

The majority of cases of hypothyroidism in this country are autoimmune, meaning the immune system attacks and destroys the thyroid gland. When an autoimmune attack flares, damage to the gland spills thyroid hormone into the bloodstream, which can amp up metabolism and cause symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, and heart palpitations. In this case proper management of the autoimmune thyroid condition can help subdue anxiety.

These are just a handful of possible causes of anxiety typically overlooked in the standard health care model. Ask my office for other strategies on managing anxiety using natural means.