

# Anxiety

## WHAT IS IT?

Approximately 40 million people suffer from anxiety disorders in the US. Anxiety can range from mild symptoms to debilitating generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, phobias, and social anxiety. It is difficult to diagnose anxiety because it can be masked by other health issues such as insomnia, fatigue, substance misuse, digestive issues, heart palpitations, headaches, muscle tension, or chronic pain.

## GENTLE NUTRITION SUGGESTIONS

Follow as you are able.

- **Balance blood sugar:** consider eating something every 2-4 hours. Incorporating protein at meals and snacks and trying not to skip meals can help keep your blood sugar more stable. Including fats (olive oil, avocado, nuts, and seeds, etc) at each meal can also help with this stability. Low blood sugar can cause the same symptoms as anxiety. Try to notice if certain foods or combinations of foods feel more or less supportive for stabilizing your blood sugar.
- **Magnesium:** this mineral plays an important role in regulating chemical messengers called neurotransmitters that are needed for relaxation and relieving muscle tension. Diets low in magnesium may be linked to increased anxiety. You may not be getting enough magnesium if you have a lower intake of plant-based foods and whole grains. Foods that are high in magnesium include leafy greens, avocado, nuts, seeds, whole grains, legumes, and dark chocolate
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** this category of fats supports brain health. Foods high in omega-3s include fatty fish (wild salmon, tuna, cod, anchovies, and sardines), walnuts, and seeds (flax, hemp, and chia). Aiming for eating fatty fish at least 2 times per week or ¼ cup of walnuts and 1-2 Tbsp of flax, hemp, or chia seeds daily can help get your daily needs met. Consider adding nuts and seeds in oatmeal, yogurt, salads, smoothies.
- **Fermented foods:** probiotic-rich foods increase the beneficial bacteria in our intestines. Our microbiome is made of bacteria and other probiotic organisms that naturally inhabit our digestive system. Our gut health can be connected to our mental health impacting conditions like anxiety. Eating certain probiotics may increase the synthesis of GABA, a neurotransmitter that reduces anxiety. Fermented foods include yogurt, kefir, kombucha, miso and traditionally fermented sauerkraut, kimchi, and pickles (they're in the refrigerated section of the grocery store).

## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Movement:** exercise can help manage anxiety. Consider incorporating a movement practice to see if this is helpful for you. Start slow and make adjustments that feel good.
- **Sleep:** Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night. Consider creating a wind down routine to get ready for bed. Turn off electronics (TV, phones, computers) one hour before bed. Try stretching, yoga, reading, and/or taking a bath with epsom salts.
- **Mindfulness:** consider trying meditation or gentle yoga to reduce anxiety and improve sleep. If you are new to meditation, start with guided meditation. Try short, 3 to 5-minute sessions and increase from there. Apps like Calm or Headspace can help you with this.
- **Supplements:** certain supplements may help manage anxiety such as Magnesium, L-theanine, B-complex vitamins, and fish oil. Talk to your dietitian or primary care provider for specific dosages and interactions with your current medications.

\*Do not engage in any of these suggestions if they are harmful to other aspects of your health.

## REMEMBER

We are imperfect beings and each day is new and different. Some days it may be easier to follow the suggestions than others. Be gentle with yourself.

## GOAL

Self-compassion and kindness towards your body.

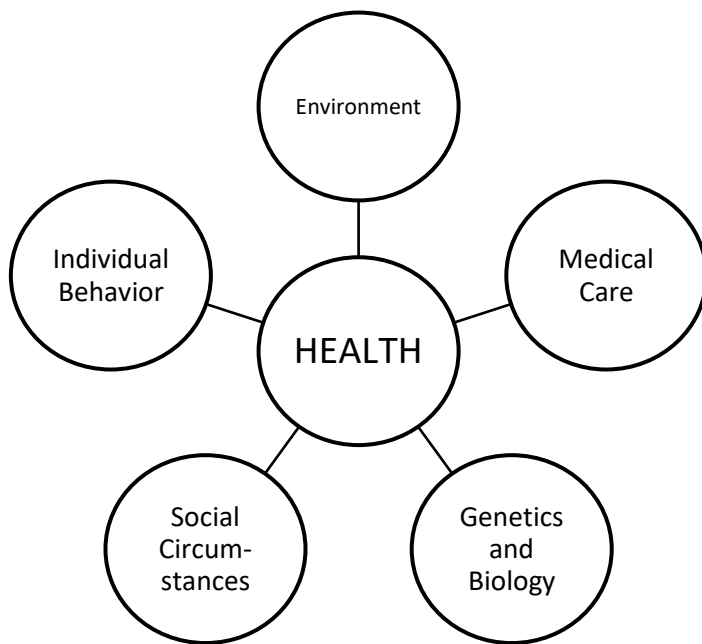
## EVERY BODY IS DIFFERENT

There are a spectrum of symptoms and reactions. If any food or movement recommendations do not feel right for your body, trust that! It may be helpful to talk more about this with your dietitian.

# TOTAL HEALTH

Health is complex and is influenced by many factors. Not all factors are within your control.

It is important to consider all these factors, not just individual behaviors, when exploring ways to address your health.



## REMINDER:

This health condition is not your fault!

Discuss causes and risk factors with your doctor or registered dietitian if you are interested.

Image Description: A series of circles with Health labeled in the center circle. There are five additional circles surrounding the center circle each one connected to the center with a line. The surrounding circles are labeled: Environment, Medical Care, Genetics and Biology, Social Circumstances, and Individual Behavior.

## REFERENCES

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Handout created by Angelina Andriola, Bastyr University Dietetic Intern and reviewed by Meghan Cichy, Registered Dietitian. Template design by Elisabeth Kelsey, Bastyr Dietetic Intern. This handout is for education purposes only. This handout should not be used as a substitute for medical advice. No changes may be made without written permission. May not be sold.