

Stress, Anxiety, Insomnia Info Sheet

“Stress can affect how you feel, think, behave and how your body works. In fact, common signs of stress include sleeping problems, sweating, loss of appetite and difficulty concentrating. You may feel anxious, irritable or low in self-esteem, and you may have racing thoughts, worry constantly or go over things in your head. You may notice that you lose your temper more easily, drink more or act unreasonably. You may also experience headaches, muscle tension or pain, or dizziness. Stress causes a surge of hormones in your body. These stress hormones are released to enable you to deal with pressures or threats – the so-called "fight or flight" response. Once the pressure or threat has passed, your stress hormone levels will usually return to normal. However, if you're constantly under stress, these hormones will remain in your body, leading to the symptoms of stress.”

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It is a good idea to notice what factors are causing you stress, how you respond to stress and then you can begin to find strategies to cope. Below are some suggestions of things you can incorporate into your life to help deal with stress, anxiety, depression or insomnia.

Lifestyle

Exercise: Include exercise in your life, it will help to increase serotonin and help you to deal with stress. It will also help to relax muscles and open the body especially if you have spent a lot of time sitting. The asana in yoga are a moving meditation helping you to feel peaceful, forgetting about the stress of daily life, connecting with your body to notice what is going on with it, enabling your body to heal itself and stretching your body to improve your physical form, release tension, and releasing trauma and emotions which are stored within the muscle tissues.

Breath: Become aware of how you breathe. Where does your breath flow to: collar bones, chest, abdomen? Is your breath fast or slow? Try and deepen your breath and slow it down. Generally if your breath is shallow and fast it will increase your stress and anxiety as it puts your body into a state of high alert. Once you get used to controlling your breath you can do this when you notice your breathing begin to become rapid.

Meditate: Meditation has been shown to have many benefits, but it can be hard to do. There are many different methods to try, try different approaches and see what works for you.

Be positive: Positive affirmations can help or focusing on the good things in your life rather than the bad things. We can learn to reprogram our brain by changing our perspective and being more positive.

It also helps to take control of your life; this will help to make you feel empowered, however accept that you aren't able to control everything and look for the positive in every situation. Challenge yourself by taking up a new hobby to take your mind away from whatever is causing you stress. Taking some time to get outside into nature is often very helpful for people. Prioritising your workload, making sure you have time out for yourself and connecting with other people can all be very helpful.

Diet

Add: Whole grains, pure water, rainbow fruit and veg, pulses, nuts and seeds. These contain B vitamins, magnesium and other nutrients vital to supporting the nervous system and overall health and vitality.

For example adding Oats into the diet for breakfast is a great way to start the day. Oats are restorative for the whole nervous system, help with exhaustion, depression and anxiety and are a source of B vitamins.

Avoid sugars, refined foods, stimulants, cigarettes, alcohol as these stress the adrenals and effect sugar levels in the body affecting mood and immunity.

Vitamins and Minerals

Stress robs the body of B vitamins. These vitamins help to relieve insomnia, improve energy levels, improve REM sleep, and promote serotonin production. Deficiency of some B vitamins manifests in a depressed mood. Vitamin B6 has a tranquilising effect and helps with mood swings from PMT.

Stress also robs the body of Vitamin C. Fatigue is an early sign of deficiency. Vitamin C is essential for immune function.

Calcium, Magnesium, Zinc: have a tranquillising effect, aiding nerve transmission and neuro-muscular activity. They relax muscle tension and help if you have twitches, cramps or muscle spasms at night.

Natural Epsom Salts are high in Magnesium, added to a bath will help the muscles to relax.

Rhodiola: Supports and protects the body in times of stress. It normalises cortisol and energy levels, anti-depressant and increases serotonin levels. Known as the Commuters Herb.

Essential Oils

Essential Oils can be used in a diffuser, added to massage oil which can be rubbed into the body or dropped into the bath, made into a spritz, added into a basic cream or dropped onto a tissue and placed on the pillow. Essential Oils are quite strong and shouldn't be placed directly on the body or taken internally, only a few drops are needed. Eg. 20-60 drops to a 100ml bottle, 4-6 drops in a teaspoon of massage oil for the bath.

Here are a few suggestions:

Frankincense: helps to relieve anxiety, rejuvenates nervous system, traditionally used for meditation as it slows down and deepens the breath, this in turn produces feelings of calm.

Neroli: helpful for palpitations, digestive cramps due to stress, promotes clarity, relaxes and stabilises emotions, lifts spirits.

Rosemary: stimulates central nervous system, brain stimulant, used for poor concentration (good for studying too), and nervous debility.

Chamomile: soothing, calming, anti-depressant, eases stress and anxiety.

Rose: sedative effect for anxiety, palpitations and insomnia.

Vetiver: Grounding when exhausted, stressed or anxious.

Lavender: helpful for insomnia, anxiety and stress.

Bergamot: Uplifting for spirits, calms emotions.

Herbs and Tinctures

Valerian – Has sedative and hypnotic effects its helpful herb for someone who cannot sleep due to excessive stress, anxiety, pain or nervous exhaustion. It's thought that Valerian increases GABA levels in the brain, regulating brain nerve cells, having a calming effect on stress and anxiety. Valerian is normally taken 30 minutes to an hour before bed.

Other useful herbs are Hawthorn flower, lime flower, passionflower and chamomile.

Herbs may need to be taken 3 times a day for up to 2 weeks for the desired effect. They can be drunk as a tea, poured into a bath or taken as a tincture with a few drops of tincture taken in water. It is important to check any herbal contraindications before taking herbs.

Source: Neals Yard Remedies