

July Newsletter
Calming Anxiety Naturally

Hello, this is Dr. Ellen. In this month's 'Real Common Sense' newsletter, I am addressing what seems to be an ever-increasing problem for many of us. We are living in a time of immediate access to information about the many ideological and manifest conflicts around the world every day as well as the aftermath of the 2-year long pandemic. This information can seem overwhelming. Perceived stressors, though not an immediate threat, can lead one to experience 'anxiety'. These are the best natural ways that I have found to help those suffering from anxiety. Over my years of practice, when the best interventions for an individual are identified by using the Ellen Cutler Method (ECM), that individual achieves the best results.

By the way, if you didn't get a chance to see my previous newsletters, you can find them on my new website, www.drellencutler.com.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is often contrasted to fear, which is a reaction to a specific observable threat, as opposed to anxiety being a diffuse, unfocused, future-oriented 'fear'. [1] Anxiety can be seen as a natural response to mental/emotional stress, a feeling of apprehension about what is or may be to come. [2] Psychologists commonly describe anxiety as "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure." [3]

A very different definition of "anxiety" is an ongoing state of dread that interferes with daily life, and from which you struggle to calm yourself, being unable to define the reason for your dread. [4] For me, this clearly defines an anxiety disorder. If your feelings of anxiety become overwhelming, last longer than six months, and interfere with your life, you may have an anxiety disorder. Those with anxiety disorders typically have recurring concerns or intrusive thoughts. They may purposely avoid specific types of situations because of this, and may experience symptoms including a rapid heartbeat, trembling, dizziness, or sweating. [2,3]

I am not addressing anxiety disorders, but rather the more common and less severe complaints of anxiety many people face today. Most of us have repeated, daily exposure to various mental/emotional stressors, at least in part because of the ever-increasing use of the internet and social media. This adds to the stressors we experience in our daily home and work lives as well as our relative social isolation because of the pandemic.

Calming Anxiety

There are several different approaches that can help diminish anxiety. [5,6] Here are some that have been helpful for some of my patients. Increasing body temperature by using a sauna can quiet the mind and help decrease anxiety through self-soothing and calming one's emotional

state.[7] Weighted blankets distribute gentle pressure over a large portion of the body all at once, creating a sense of calm and safety.[8] Significant time spent in natural settings ('Forest bathing') restores the health of the human body through a "five senses experience" via exposure to a forest environment and has been found to help alleviate anxiety.[9]

Exercise and meditation (including deep breathing exercises) can be quite helpful in decreasing mental/emotional stress and anxiety. [5,6] These activities affect the endocannabinoid system (ECS), which plays an important role in balancing many aspects of the human condition, including mood, feelings of stress, and sleep. The ECS links external and internal perceptions to specific body/mind experiences, such as anxiety and stress-coping, allowing one to adapt to a changing environment. Our bodies produce molecules called endocannabinoids that bind to and stimulate the two types of receptors of the ECS. [10,11] The relationship between exercise and/or meditation with the ECS and its role in lessening anxiety is seen in studies where anxiety ratings were significantly decreased with exercise or meditation. In both, the decreases in anxiety were accompanied by increases in circulating endocannabinoids.[12,13]

Some of my patients suffering from anxiety have received at least some benefits from psychological counseling or psychotherapy. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been of varying degrees of assistance in a number of my patients. CBT has been found to be a moderately effective treatment for anxiety (and some anxiety disorders) when compared to placebo.[14] Another helpful tool for my patients has been mindfulness-based therapy (MBT), which has also been found to be moderately effective for improving anxiety and mood symptoms from pre- to post-treatment.[15] MBT seems to be more easily 'brought home' and to become a regular practice. I personally begin every day with mindfulness meditation and find I do best when I live in the present moment throughout the day.

Supplements

There are several nutritional supplements (for occasional or short-term use) that I have found helpful for those suffering from anxiety. These include several herbal preparations, including

chamomile (in those without a ragweed allergy); passionflower, valerian, or hops (each may have a sedating effect); and lemon balm (which may cause some GI distress).[5,6,16] Other supplements that I have found to be helpful include L-theanine (or green tea), γ -Aminobutyric acid (GABA), and magnesium (combined with vitamin B6 in cases of severe stress).[6,17,18]

The ECS mentioned above can be influenced by naturally occurring plant-derived chemicals. The body produces at least two molecules, 'anandamide' being one of them, that bind to and stimulate the two receptors of the ECS. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) from marijuana can bind to both receptors and can cause the feeling of being 'high'. I generally do not recommend its use as it is illegal in certain states, is culturally stigmatized by some individuals of various backgrounds, and can have some undesirable effects on some people. The other major plant cannabinoid is cannabidiol (CBD), the major active compound found in hemp. Unlike THC, CBD does not bind to the receptors; it instead prevents endocannabinoids from being broken down, thus prolonging their effect on your body.[10] CBD does not cause a feeling of being high and is legal in most states in the U.S. when derived from hemp oil with less than 0.3% THC. I have received numerous positive reports from patients experiencing decreased anxiety using CBD oil.

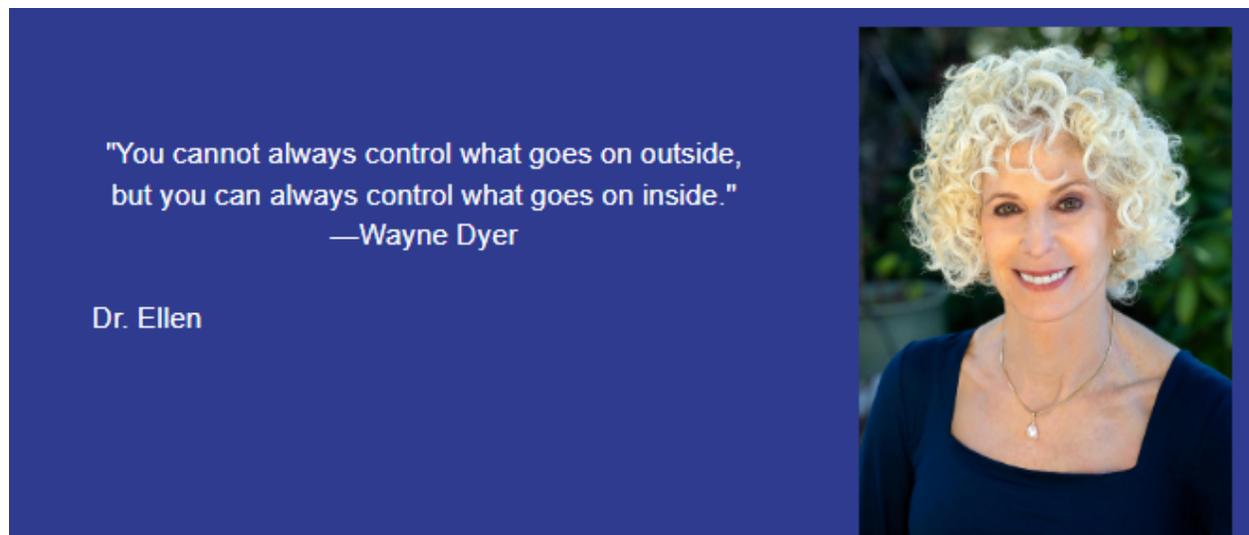
Several essential oils contain another compound, beta-caryophyllene, that also acts on the ECS. It binds to the cannabinoid receptors predominantly found outside of the central nervous system and can help with stress-related issues. The essential oils containing beta-caryophyllene include hemp (along with CBD), lavender, black pepper, clove, and most abundantly in copaiba oil. I have found these to be helpful in some of my patients in calming their anxious states.[19] However, I have seen a more consistent calming effect from hemp-derived CBD oil. I recommend trying "Viva Oil", available through my website, www.drellencutler.com.

Ellen Cutler Method (ECM)

One of the beauties of ECM is that it can determine the underlying root cause of anxiety or other emotions in combination, and optimal interventions to use for each person. And ECM can identify underlying issues causing or perpetuating the anxiety and address these directly. Without such testing, these factors often go unrecognized, even after psychotherapeutic efforts. There can be passed or ongoing events, circumstances, or relationships to which the individual is sensitive. Desensitization can oftentimes diminish or completely reverse these causes of anxiety.

Over my years of practice. I have seen almost amazing turnarounds in many patients. Though usually do not come to see me because of their anxiety issues, decreased anxiety has often been a very pleasant surprise for them. This in turn has oftentimes resulted in an improvement at home or work, sometimes so significant that they can hardly believe it, except for the fact that they are experiencing it for themselves.

So, be well, be healthy, and remember...



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