10 Non-Medication Strategies for Managing and Relieving Anxiety

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Natural Ways to Reduce Anxiety

As someone who has suffered from anxiety for several years, I have learned several tricks for managing my anxiety. I am unashamed to state that I do take a daily medication to treat my anxiety and have no plans of stopping that medication — but I try my best to manage my anxiety and panic attacks through non-medication strategies.

Some of these strategies I have found work best when done daily, such as yoga. Other strategies can be used in the moment to reduce anxiety, such as breathing techniques.

On the next page, you'll find additional ways to relieve anxiety without medication from a fellow writer who also suffers from anxiety, Anna Jackson.

Now it's time for you to learn how to relieve anxiety naturally and ways to control anxiety.

Develop a Yoga Routine

Yoga has been instrumental in managing my anxiety. As someone who has practiced yoga for over half my life but has only had anxiety for several years, maybe that says something!

That being said, I have practiced yoga since I was 15 years old. My practice has been off-and-on, but largely on.

I developed anxiety when I was 28, at a time in my life when I wasn't regularly practicing yoga. Later on in life, I restarted my yoga practice because I knew that I physically and emotionally felt better when I was practicing yoga.

I even took the next step and have enrolled in a yoga teacher training program, with the hopes of helping others control their mental health issues through yoga.

In a small study performed in Germany in 2005, participants performed a daily yoga practice for 90 days. At the completion of the study, participants stated that overall, depression improved by 50 percent, anxiety improved by 30 percent and overall wellbeing improved by 65 percent.

Keep in mind that this was a small-scale study and for a short duration — if anxiety levels improved by 30 percent in 90 days, imagine what they will do if performed on a daily basis long-term!

I encourage everyone who has anxiety to begin a daily yoga practice. Remember that yoga can be performed at home — it doesn't need to be done in a studio. There are a variety of websites, apps and books to assist your yoga for anxiety practice.

Cut Down on Screen Time

This is a tough one. In our society, we all have our phones glued to our ears and our hands, always talking, texting and checking out Instagram and Facebook. We're emailing when we're not at work, we're "liking" the latest posts and we're checking the news hourly.

However, the constant attention to the screen can increase anxiety – and this is just my personal opinion from my own experience.

I have a son who is almost three. I work a day job, I write for *NewLifeOutlook* and I have family and friends who live across the country. It simply isn't reasonable for me to turn my phone on do not disturb or silent because unfortunately, people need to get a hold of me.

However, I am guilty of using my phone too much — and I *know*, without a doubt, that it contributes to my anxiety.

When my anxiety kicks up, one of the first things I do, if the timing is reasonable (for example, my son is at home with me and not at daycare), I'll turn it on silent. If this isn't reasonable, I will put it in another room so that I will not constantly want to check my notifications but I will hear it if it rings.

I will also purposely limit my screen time by turning *off* notifications, such as for Facebook, Instagram and my email. This means — GASP! — that I have to click on the icons to see if anything has happened!

If things are really crazy in my life, I'll temporarily delete Facebook from my phone so that I won't mindlessly cruise through everyone else's lives.

Practice Relaxation Techniques

I have various websites bookmarked on my phone, so I can access guided relaxations wherever I am at. I always have headphones with me — in my purse and in my work bag. This way when my anxiety flares, I can plug in a set of headphones and take five to 10 minutes and let someone else guide me through a serious of exercises calm myself.

Although you can do a Google or YouTube search and find a wealth of these techniques, my favorite is from Dartmouth University. These exercises can even be downloaded so that you can access them if you do not have internet access.

Another technique that I use in a pinch is simply counting. Sometimes it isn't reasonable to pull out a set of headphones and focus on your breathing. For example, in the middle of a stressful meeting if you find yourself getting anxious, try slowing your breathing and counting.

I theorize that this works because it takes our minds off the reason we're anxious and forces us to concentrate on one simple thing — the numbers in our heads.

Exercise Helps Reduce Anxiety Symptoms

Some studies show that exercise not only helps relieve anxiety after one vigorous workout, but regular exercise can also help reduce the symptoms of anxiety over time.

As well as achieving better physical fitness, the mental benefits of regular exercise include:

- Taking your mind off worries
- Gaining confidence
- Releasing tension
- Improving sleep
- Boosting energy levels

- Reduction in frustration, anger and stress

Where exercise techniques like yoga help you to feel more relaxed, others like running and hiking release endorphins, which cause you to feel euphoric and positive.

Next page: Learn more natural ways to reduce anxiety with herbs, pressure points to reduce anxiety and more ways to relieve anxiety.

Use Herbs to Decrease Anxiety

Lavender and chamomile have proven to be an effective remedy for both anxiety and depression.

This herb has a calming, relaxing effect and helps with sleep, panic attacks, irritability and restlessness. It has also been shown to be just as effective as the drug Lorazepam without the sedative effects.

I've used this myself, and I find it very useful.

There are many lavender products you can find online such as:

- Bath salts
- Diffusers
- Air Sprays
- Candles
- Potpourri
- Pillow mist

Chamomile is an herb that has been used for thousands of years in herbal medicines. The calming effects of chamomile tea promote sleep as well as anxiety and stress relief.

Chamomile can be taken either as a tea or by capsule, which can be found at many health or grocery stores.

If you have asthma, please consult your doctor before using chamomile as it has been found to exacerbate symptoms.

Cut Down on Caffeine

Too much caffeine can make you jittery and anxious. Consuming too much caffeine can cause you to feel more nervous and keep you up when you need to sleep.

If you drink a lot of coffee, try reducing your intake by a cup a day and see if you notice any decrease in symptoms. I used to drink a lot more coffee than I do now and I saw the benefits of cutting back.

Also, be sure to be aware of other sources of caffeine such as sodas, energy drinks, teas and even some ice creams.

Practice Meditation

Mediation is something I tried briefly in the past but couldn't quite get my focus to work with it.

It was only very recently that I decided to practice meditation again and this time my efforts have been successful. If like me, you tend to get distracted easily, I suggest finding a spot that is quiet and devoid of any distractions and surrounding noise.

Mindfulness meditation is a proven way to reduce anxiety as well as your overall mental health. The Internet is

packed full of meditation techniques and videos should you want to give it a try.

Acupuncture and Massage Therapy

Acupuncture is an ancient form of alternative medicine where fine needles are inserted on particular sites in the body. This alternative medicine has been found to stimulate the part of the brain that controls emotions, including anxiety.

In addition to this, depending on where the needles are situated, acupuncture can help to relieve pain, stress and tension that may be contributing to your anxiety.

Massage therapy relieves tension and stress in your body. Relaxation created by regular massage lowers your blood pressure and elevates your mood.

Professional massage therapists can target specific areas that carry symptoms of your anxiety. Massage therapy improves sleep by reducing insomnia and relieving pain from muscle tension.

Fake Laugh to Elevate Your Mood

Laughing and smiling causes the brain to release dopamine, which makes you feel happy. It's been proven that even a phony laugh can give you a shot of dopamine, too.

Laughter increases the oxygen in your body, which leads to muscle relaxation. It shifts your focus and elevates your mood.

Hang out with your friends, watch a comedy or read a funny book. Bringing laughter into your life more regularly helps you to look at the world around you more positively.

Laugh more, feel happier and relieve those anxious feelings.

Talking Therapy Can Help

Some of us find it easier to talk to strangers than we to do our family and friends.

As someone who has taken both counseling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), I can personally vouch for how effective Talking Therapies can be.

You are usually assigned a therapist who will work with you one-on-one for the duration of your therapy sessions. This creates a safe, calm and private environment where you can feel relaxed enough to talk openly.

In this environment, you can feel free to express your emotions, troubles and fears without the feeling of being misunderstood or judged. Sometimes just talking to someone about our feelings, worries and issues helps us to not only ourselves but also others.

Different types of talking therapies include:

- Mindfulness
- Bereavement Counselling
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Cognitive Analytic Therapy
- Counselling
- Interpersonal Therapy
- Family therapy
- Psychoanalysis

If you are interested in seeking therapy for anxiety or any other mental health issues, speak to your doctor who can refer you to your nearest therapists.

The Bottom Line…

These are my favorite ways to combat an anxious mind. Try them out and see if they work for you. Don't be afraid to ask others too about how they relieve their anxiety.