

Ayurvedic Support for Mild Anxiety

by Shannon Mooney

The mind, body, and spirit are intricately linked. Anxiety is a condition that originates in the mind, causing physiological changes similar to the stress response in the body. Ayurvedically speaking, anxiety is a doshic imbalance where excess vata accumulates in the nervous system. Because we are in the height of vata season, it is a common time to experience increased anxiety in the form of insomnia, a restless mind, nervousness, panic, and/or fearful thoughts. Ayurveda offers time-tested wisdom regarding diet, lifestyle, herbal remedies, yoga, meditation, and pranayama to help bring balance to the body and ease anxiety.

The belief of Ayurveda is that the body is born with an inherent wisdom to always return to a healthy state of blissful mind, body, and spirit. In the case of anxiety, Ayurveda teaches the tools to achieve a natural, healthful life by first identifying and removing the cause of the anxiety, whether it be a vata-aggravating diet or lifestyle, habitual negative thinking, or an unhealthy reaction to stress, and then balance the doshas within the body. The Ayurvedic approach to cultivating a sense of calm and well-being is to balance vata dosha.

Diet

A vata pacifying diet can help to reduce vata in the body and mind. Follow nature's lead by eating a variety of fresh, seasonal, organic foods. The plentiful root vegetables and squashes of autumn are particularly grounding for vata. Choose meals that are warm, soft, and easy to digest. Try nourishing one pot meals, like Kitcheri http://www.banyanbotanicals.com/ayurveda/kitch_ghee.html

Other important dietary guidelines for balancing the body:

- Eat at routine times, using Vata Digest to help support a healthy appetite.
- Take time to lovingly prepare and enjoy nutritious meals.
- Avoid ice cold drinks, particularly taken with meals or immediately after.
- Limit raw, cold foods such as salads and raw vegetables.
- Minimize caffeinated beverages and other stimulants. These increase vata, aggravating the nervous system.
- Include warm milk spiced with a pinch of ginger, cinnamon, cardamom and nutmeg. This is a nutritious way to soothe the nerves and, when taken before bed, will promote sound sleep.
- Limit alcohol consumption. This substance has an adverse effect on the nervous system.
- Eat meals at regular times each day, making lunch the largest meal of the day.

Lifestyle

According to Ayurveda, abhyanga, or self oil massage is an important component of a vata-pacifying routine. The Sanskrit word sneha can be translated as both "oil" and "love". It is believed that the effects of abhyanga are similar to those received when one is saturated with love. Like the experience of being loved, abhyanga can give a deep feeling of stability, safety, and warmth. This practice nourishes and strengthens the body, encourages regular sleep patterns, stimulates internal organs, enhances blood circulation and can significantly reduce vata. To help reduce vata, organic sesame oil or Vata Massage Oil can be used. For maximum results, massage daily.

Stress is a common factor in many disorders, including anxiety. Often anxiety arises from the body's inappropriate response to external stressors, so it is of utmost importance to choose an appropriate and healthful way to deal with stress. How you react to stress is dependent on your constitution. Highly sensitive vata dosha is particularly affected by stressors and excess stimuli. During this time it may be helpful to reduce sources of stress. Try to identify negative coping patterns and replace them with positive ones such as optimism, affirmations, laughter, inspirational reading, or uplifting music.

Regular moderate exercise such as walking, swimming, yoga, or tai chi can be a great way to relieve tension and anxiety and allow energy to flow freely in the body. Regular exercise also has a powerful positive effect on mood, improving self-esteem and the ability to handle stressful life situations.

Getting regular sleep is absolutely essential to health of both the body and mind. When in a state of deep sleep, little or no energy is consumed. This quiet state gives the body and mind a chance to renew, refresh and restore themselves.

Nasya oil helps ease mental and emotional stress, anxiety, fear and negativity. Lubrication of the nasal passages with medicated oil provides subtle moisture to the air we breathe and affects the higher cerebral faculties and sensory organs. It supports clarity of perception, intuition and stimulates memory. Nasya supports cerebral circulation, restoring and balancing prana in the body.

Here is a simple procedure to follow for self-administration of nasya:

- Begin by comfortably lying down on your back and tilting your head back with your nostrils opening towards the sky. If you are lying on a bed, you may hang your head off the edge of the bed, or place a small pillow beneath your neck for support.
- Place 5-10 drops of nasya oil in each nostril. With skill, you can administer the oil, drop by drop, circling the inside perimeter of the nostril, thoroughly coating the nasal membranes.
- Take a big sniff in, then rest for a few minutes allowing the nasya to penetrate.

When feeling anxious, it is common to be constantly worrying about “what ifs” or getting caught up in what others are thinking. Many times fearful or negative thoughts can become habitual. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has said, “ We have to be able to recognize a habit when it manifests itself, because if we know how to recognize our habit, it will lose its energy and will not be able to push us anymore...We have to practice in order to be able to transform this habit in us.”

Yoga, meditation and/or pranayama, when practiced regularly have transformative powers on the mind, body, and spirit. These practices help to quiet the mind and bring the body more in touch with the heart and a divine universal consciousness where fear does not exist. Getting in touch with universal consciousness helps you to recognize the illusory nature of individual fears.

Yoga

Yoga is one practice that helps to draw your attention inward. Particularly when coordinating breath with movement in your practice, the mind can be freed of thought by simply following the breath and how it moves in the body. Certain asanas or poses such as Child’s pose, Knees-to-chest, and Legs Up the Wall help to relieve excess vata and calm the nervous system. Go to this link for more information

<http://www.banyanbotanicals.com/yoga/vata/index.html>

Pranayama

Exercising the breath helps to circulate prana throughout the body. The breathing of an anxious person is usually shallow, light, and tends to be rapid. A person can feel easily fatigued because they are not able to access energy that is released from the absorption of prana. Learning to slow the rate of breathing and move the breath deep into the abdomen can decrease anxiety and help to balance other symptoms of anxiety. A simple practice of deep abdominal breathing for 10 rounds whenever anxious or anticipating anxiety can help calm the body and mind.

Meditation

Meditation is an invaluable tool for managing stress and easing anxiety. When practiced regularly, you

experience a deep sense of peace. As a result, you will be able to carry that sense of calm into your everyday life. It will become second nature to meet challenges with peace and equanimity.

- Sit quietly, firmly rooted, focusing on the crown of your head and your breath.
- Bring your awareness to the natural rhythm of your breath.
- Notice the gentle inhalation, exhalation and the short pause of retention in between.
- If the mind begins to wander, invite it back to the breath.
- Allow thoughts to ebb and flow with the breath, staying perfectly present to each moment.
- Practice meditating 10-20 minutes every day.

Ayurveda and Yoga can be useful tools to help you face your fears, guide you back to your true nature, and heal your life.