



# Anxiety

# MEDS

How they Work  
to Stop Anxiety

The Benefits and Risks Involved

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# Anxiety Meds: How they Work to Stop Anxiety ...The Benefits and Risks Involved

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## Important

The information in this book is not intended to be used for self-diagnosis nor to be taken as a substitute for good individual personal professional medical attention. The only intent of the author is to offer information to help you in your quest for well-being and no responsibility can be taken by the author or the publisher for the way this information is used.

It is strongly recommended that anyone who is thinking, feeling or behaving in a way that they don't understand, any way that is causing pain or unhappiness, should consult a medical professional and that a medical doctor should always be consulted for any persistent physical or bodily function problem, in the first instance, to rule out possible physical causes before psychological reasons are explored. And that, importantly, under no circumstances, should anybody stop taking prescribed medication without fully qualified medical supervision.

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## Introduction

This eBook is the second in a series of three, covering key areas that are extremely important for anyone trying to understand and deal with anxiety and the problems it can bring.

Anxiety medications – something that many of us consider using or start using because of our anxiety so it's wise to know more about them.

You can get the first book (*Anxiety Symptoms*) and third book (*Anxiety Disorders*) at:  
**[www.help-for.com/free-anxiety-ebooks.htm](http://www.help-for.com/free-anxiety-ebooks.htm)**

Anxiety is frightening; it's meant to be, to protect us from danger. But when it strikes often, for no apparent reason, and we cannot control it, it's not surprising that we turn to anything we can for relief.

Some people self-medicate with alcohol, others use recreational drugs. But for many of us, the preferred choice is pharmaceutical drugs – medication available from our doctor by prescription.

Prescription medications have their uses and their drawbacks, and to understand why this is the case, we have to know how they work. We need to know what they do to our mind and body to stop anxiety.

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## Anxiety Medications

*(As of September 2019)*

The medical definition of a disorder is: *'an illness that disrupts normal physical or mental functions'* and the medical model of anxiety problems views them as just that: illnesses caused by something going wrong (in our brain), and that the answer lies in 'fixing' the thing that has gone wrong.

One of the ways we seek to 'fix' these problems is with medication.

Currently there are a number of pharmaceutical drugs that are prescribed for high anxiety (and related problems) and, in essence, these attempt to do one of three things:-

### 1. Stop the thoughts and feelings of anxiety

Tranquilizers (Benzodiazepines) are one of the most widely prescribed types of medication for anxiety. They have been available since the 1960s and are used to treat problems such as severe anxiety and insomnia due to their sedative, hypnotic and muscle-relaxing properties.

Common tranquilizers include:-

- **Xanax** (alprazolam)
- **Klonopin** (clonazepam)
- **Valium** (diazepam)
- **Ativan** (lorazepam)

Benzodiazepines work by reducing brain activity (by depressing the impulses between brain cells) and slowing down the central nervous system. Taking tranquilizers for anxiety reduces anxiety by reducing thoughts and feelings in general.

This reduction of anxious thoughts and 'numbing' of feelings can be very calming and they work quickly (often bringing relief in around 30 minutes to an hour), which makes them very effective when taken during an anxiety attack or panic attack. However, tranquilizers can be extremely physically addictive and long-term use should be avoided.

Side effects of this anxiety medication reflect the 'numbing' of feelings and 'slowing down' of mind and body. Common ones include:-

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Poor balance or coordination
- Slurred speech
- Trouble concentrating
- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Stomach upset
- Headache
- Blurred vision

Generally, the higher the dose, the more intense these side effects are. However, even low doses can make some people feel very drowsy, foggy, and uncoordinated, which can cause problems with work, at school, or performing everyday activities such as driving. This medication can cause a 'hangover' that lasts over 24 hours.

Long-term usage of tranquilizers often leads to extreme physical dependence and drug-tolerance, with increasingly higher doses needed to get the same anxiety relief as before. This can happen relatively quickly (usually within a few months) but sometimes it only takes a few weeks.

Stopping this medication abruptly can lead to severe withdrawal symptoms, such as:

- Increased anxiety, restlessness, shaking
- Insomnia, memory problems
- Stomach pain
- Depression
- Confusion, panic attacks
- Pounding heart, sweating, and in severe cases, seizure

After the awful experiences of millions of people throughout the world who became addicted to tranquilizers for decades, it is now well established that benzodiazepines should only be taken short-term for anxiety relief.

\* \* \*

## 2. Balance chemicals in the brain

Now that a link between anxiety and depression has been well established, certain antidepressants are becoming more widely prescribed to help alleviate anxiety.

These medications work on the premise that depression (and anxiety) result from an imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain (namely those related to mood, such as serotonin) and attempt to address the issue by preventing the brain from 'over-using' these chemicals.

Currently, there are four types of antidepressant used to treat anxiety in this way:-

### i) Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

SSRIs work by stopping nerve cells in the brain from reabsorbing serotonin, a chemical thought to play an important role in mood regulation.

Examples of SSRIs usually prescribed for anxiety include:-

- **Celexa** (citalopram)
- **Lexapro** (escitalopram)
- **Paxil** (paroxetine)
- **Prozac** (fluoxetine)
- **Zoloft** (sertraline)

SSRIs generally take around 4-6 weeks to start working and relieve anxiety symptoms so they can't be taken 'as needed in the moment' to prevent or stop anxiety or panic attacks.

These antidepressants are usually taken on a long-term basis (often for up to 12 months) and therefore their use is generally limited to chronic anxiety problems that require ongoing treatment, such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder.

There are many common side effects that we can experience when taking antidepressant medications that selectively inhibit the reuptake of serotonin in our brain, these are:-

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Agitation
- Drowsiness
- Weight gain
- Diarrhea
- Insomnia
- Sexual dysfunction
- Nervousness

- Headaches
- Dry mouth
- Increased sweating

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## ii) Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs)

These medications work by reducing the brain's absorption of not only the chemical serotonin (related to mood) but also norepinephrine, which is related to the way our mind and body use the stress-related hormone adrenaline.

Examples of SNRIs for anxiety are:-

- **Cymbalta** (duloxetine)
- **Effexor** (venlafaxine)
- **Effexor XR** (venlafaxine XR)

As with SSRIs, SNRIs can take several weeks to have an effect and they also produce similar side effects such as: dizziness, drowsiness or fatigue, dry mouth, weight gain, insomnia, headaches, loss of appetite plus the additional effect of high blood pressure.

\*

## iii) Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs)

Serotonin and norepinephrine are chemicals that occupy the spaces between neurons in our brain and relay messages between those neurons. They are known as 'neurotransmitters'.

Tricyclic antidepressants increase the levels of serotonin and norepinephrine and block the action of a third neurotransmitter, acetylcholine.

Examples of TCAs are:-

- **Elavil** (amitriptyline)
- **Tofranil** (imipramine)
- **Pamelor** (nortriptyline)

Tricyclics are an older class of antidepressant drug and although they may be effective for the treatment of depression and anxiety in some cases, doctors often prescribe SSRIs instead since they cause fewer side effects.

One major disadvantage of the tricyclics is that they sometimes produce distressing cardiac effects (such as dizziness and heart palpitations) – some of the very symptoms they are used to alleviate.

However, TCAs may be useful for some people, especially if other medications do not provide relief.

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#### iv) Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs)

Monoamine oxidase is an enzyme which is involved in removing the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine from the brain. MAOIs prevent this from happening, which causes the levels of these brain chemicals to remain higher.

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors are one of the earliest types of antidepressant, and include:-

- **Marplan** (isocarboxazid)
- **Nardil** (phenelzine)
- **Emsam** (selegiline)

MAOIs can have very serious side effects such as a sudden increase in blood pressure. This, and the fact that they react with other medications (and many foods and drinks) means that people taking them often need to have a restrictive diet to protect from this.

Although MOAIs have generally been replaced by the more modern antidepressants, they are often prescribed 'off-label' for panic disorder.

\*

Regarding antidepressants, it is worth pointing out that the basic assumption on which their effectiveness relies, remains under question. An imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain has never actually been proven to be the cause of depression (and anxiety) although it is widely accepted as fact, thanks mainly due to it being said by so many people, so often.

However, anxiety and depression deplete our body of many resources, including such things as energy, vitamins, minerals, electrolytes and, no doubt, also neurotransmitters. Any imbalance of chemicals is likely the result of these problems and not the cause.

Balancing chemicals in the brain through the action of prescription drugs may alleviate some symptoms temporarily but it does not address the underlying reason for the problem.

Another aspect of antidepressants must also be considered for it can be very grave, that is: suicide. Mercifully rare, and usually confined to children and younger adults (aged 18-24yrs), regarding depression: antidepressants can make depression worse rather than better for some people. This can lead to an increased risk of suicide, hostility, and even homicidal behavior. Consequently, anyone taking such anti-depression medication should be very closely monitored.

\* \* \*

Before we look at the final set of drugs and what they try and do, there is one more medication that we need to consider, that is: Aziprones.

Comprising one main pill: **Buspar** (buspirone), this is a relatively new medication that combines mild tranquilization effects along with balancing brain chemicals by increasing levels of serotonin and decreasing levels of dopamine. Common side effects of Buspar include those due to mild tranquilization (related to numbness and drowsiness) and those experienced with most antidepressants.

\* \* \*

And so we come to the third thing that certain types of medication prescribed for anxiety try to do:

### 3. Stop anxiety from happening

Beta blockers are now widely prescribed as the first course of action for anyone who sits in front of a doctor and mentions the word 'anxiety'. And it's extremely important to be aware that these medicines are used 'off label' for treating anxiety. They were actually developed for the treatment of heart problems.

Common beta blockers include:-

- **Inderal** (propranolol)
- **Tenormin** (atenolol)
- **Cardicor, Emcor** (bisoprolol)

In times of stress and emergency, the adrenal gland produces adrenaline, which acts on various organs in the body to enable us to deal with the situation. For example, the heart beats faster due to adrenaline.

In order for adrenaline to be able to do this, various organs in our body have receptors (known as beta receptors) to accept the adrenaline and use it to behave differently in times of stress.

Beta blockers prevent these receptors from doing their job; they stop internal organs (depending on the beta blocker used) from accepting adrenaline.

Originally beta blockers like Propranolol (Inderal) were developed for people with heart problems. Taking this medication means the heart does less work in general and doesn't get over-worked in times of stress – a necessity for people with a weak heart or those recovering from a heart attack.

Now, because of this action, beta blockers are being widely prescribed for increased anxiety and related problems.

One of the main symptoms of anxiety is a speeding heart, which is part of the fight-or-flight response. In the face of threat or danger, our body produces adrenaline to make the heart beat faster to get blood and oxygen (fuel) to our major muscles (arms, chest and legs) more quickly to help us to fight or flee. Stopping the heart from beating faster makes us feel calmer.

Taking beta blockers for anxiety also makes us feel less shaky. That energy boost to our muscles (from the increased supply of blood and oxygen) which makes us feel 'jittery' and 'on-edge' doesn't happen without a fast heartbeat.

These advantages have led many people to start taking beta blockers to help deal with performance anxiety.

### **Beta Blockers and Performance Anxiety**

Many artists do experience some level of anxiety whilst performing and in one study around 20% of the musicians taking part experienced marked distress during performances.

Most performers cope without drugs but many now take beta blockers (usually Inderal), often illegally, to deal with stage fright.

Musicians, actors and sportsmen use them to help with steadiness, concentration and to reduce any nervousness when performing. However, while beta blockers do help to reduce stage fright, many people believe that some nervousness is necessary to perform at the highest level.

With these obvious benefits, it may seem that beta blockers offer the ideal solution for anxiety problems.

But it's not as simple as this.

Although they aren't physically addictive (like most tranquilizers are) these drugs can soon become psychologically addictive and we start to feel that we can't do anything before taking a tablet.

Also, beta blockers only block the adrenaline – they don't stop it from being released, and the question remains as to what happens to all of that extra adrenaline our body produces to ready us for action.

Perhaps more importantly, long-term usage of beta blockers can alter the natural function of the heart and stopping this medication suddenly without medical supervision can be extremely dangerous. This may be a necessary risk if the alternative is a heart attack... but to deal with anxiety?

There are also many other side effects that we can experience when taking beta blockers.

### **Beta Blockers Side Effects**

#### **1. Weight Gain:**

Taking beta blockers and weight gain is extremely common. We all need a certain amount of adrenaline and the natural boost it gives to our organs to be active. Perhaps blocking adrenaline leads to a more 'sluggish' system and consequent weight gain.

#### **2. Tiredness:**

For the same reason as above. Blocking the action of 'everyday' adrenaline along with any excess produced robs us of energy.

### 3. Depression:

Again, we all need a certain amount of adrenaline in order to be vibrant and active. In effect, beta blockers depress our vibrancy.

### 4. Impotence/ED in Men and Loss of Libido in Women:

How can we be 'in the mood' if we feel sluggish, tired and depressed?

### 5. Blurred vision:

Another fight-or-flight response in times of anxiety is sharpness of vision. Thanks to adrenaline, our vision improves dramatically when we are under threat. We see more clearly in order to see any danger coming. To enable this, our eyes also have beta-receptors.

### 6. Feeling Faint and Dizziness:

In slowing down the heart, beta blockers also reduce blood pressure. Indeed they are often prescribed for high blood pressure. Low blood pressure can result in dizziness and fainting.

7. Other (relatively) common side effects when taking beta blockers include: diarrhoea, cold hands and feet, nausea and sleep disturbance.

It is important to realise that beta blockers are not a cure for anxiety problems. They dampen some of the physical symptoms but do not deal with the underlying reason for the anxiety.

As a temporary relief for dealing with stressful events, the short-term usage of beta blockers may be beneficial. But to use a heart medication long-term to deal with anxiety problems... the risks may outweigh the benefits!

\*

The above information on anxiety medication is provided to help you understand the different types of medicines available, what they attempt to do, how they work and the benefits and risks involved. But please remember... *under no circumstances, should anybody stop taking prescribed medication without fully qualified medical supervision.*

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## **Anxiety Problems and Medication (Overview)**

Most of us trust everything the doctor tells us. If he or she tells us (in good faith) that we have an illness we generally accept it. And it may appear to serve us well to accept it – a name for our problem and, in one sense, a relief. It's not our fault but a faulty gene or a chemical imbalance, an illness that we were just unfortunate to contract, nothing at all to do with problems in our life.

But this answer doesn't work for long since it ignores the incredible power of the human mind and in doing so doesn't even come close to providing a solution.

In viewing anxiety problems as 'something that has gone wrong and needs fixing', the bigger picture is overlooked. Medication works on a physiological (physical) level; anxiety problems are psychological and the answer is psychological.

Medication does have its uses. When we are overwhelmed by anxiety, fears or despair, the appropriate short-term medication can alleviate those symptoms and give us the relief we need to start tackling the problem correctly.

Short-term medication can be a lifesaver. However, long-term usage of medication generally serves to make things worse for it fuels the very core of the problem. It strengthens our inner feelings of insecurity and weakness. We have to take a tablet to be okay therefore we must be weak. Having to take medication at all (to be 'normal') confirms our inner self-doubt.

Also, if medication has calmed us, once we stop taking it, any anxiety that we experience will feel greater for we are used to being calm. Withdrawal from medication can result in many anxiety symptoms feeling worse, again strengthening the underlying problem. Yet we are turning into a society that is dependent on medication where emotional and life issues have now become illnesses that merit treatment, usually in the form of a pill.

With problems that are defined by anxiety, fear and despair, it would nice if they could be just taken away, removed from us without further struggle – but it doesn't work like that. Medication may have some short-term benefits but it can never be a cure for anything related to anxiety.

With anxiety problems, it's important to realise that anxiety, in itself, is not the problem. It's why we have too much anxiety – what is causing it – that is.

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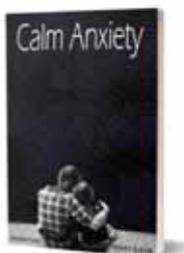
**Help for Anxiety ...** *(further reading)*

### **Calm Anxiety: Taking Back Control**

Why am I more anxious than my friends, my family, my colleagues?

Why do I get so scared in certain situations?

What can I do about it?



A totally new way to understand and deal with the increased anxiety that plagues so many of us today, this book reveals why we become too anxious in the first place and shows how to stop it naturally.

**Read the First Chapter at: [www.help-for.com/ca-chapter1.htm](http://www.help-for.com/ca-chapter1.htm)**

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