

Anxiety, Depression, Insomnia, & Panic Disorder; Augmented Treatment

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RJ Oenbrink DO

Anybody who has ever suffered from the above disorders knows how much suffering can be involved. It may be a surprise to know that there is a very real risk of death from these as well. Suicide is a very real risk factor. Simply getting treated for them can actually increase the risk of death as well. Some folks feel too bad to go to the trouble of suicide until they start getting treatment and feel a little better--then use the PERMANENT solution to the TEMPORARY problem. It's very sad and very painful.

Medications can be very helpful for treating these disorders. There seems to be a long-standing disagreement between social workers and psychologists who specialize in "talk therapy" and physicians (the only group who can prescribe medications) about which works better; medications vs. various forms of psychotherapy/talk therapy. The good news is that both work OK by themselves, but when combined together the benefit is much greater. There is a third form of treatment that is often overlooked however; it's frequently a key to permanent resolution of the suffering.

The pain and suffering happens as a direct result of a chemical imbalance in the brain. Generally there are low levels of activity of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine. Taking medications boosts the activity of these chemicals back to normal. Brain cells interact by creating an electrical charge which travels down the length of the nerve cell (neuron). At the end of the cell there is a chemical neurotransmitter (NT) that is released. The NT then crosses a very narrow synaptic cleft where it affects the next nerve cell in the sequence. Depending on the NT involved, it can either cause the next cell to continue firing the electrical impulse or help retard a new impulse from propagating down the next neuron, depending on the neurons and NT's involved. Medications work to affect the activity of specific NT's in different parts of the brain.

So much for the review of how you got to feel so terrible, what can be done about it?

Physicians are trained to do "pattern recognition". If a patient comes in with complaints of severe chest pain/pressure, sweatiness, shortness of breath all worse with stress or exertion, it's an easily recognized pattern that most doctors will think of a heart attack. Anxiety, insomnia, depression and panic disorder are linked with a different diagnostic pattern that not every doctor is familiar with or comfortable dealing with. This is the third form of treatment that can help you feel better.

Prehistoric man started a behavior pattern that continues to today. They made gods to worship with the belief that a higher being was "running the show" of life on this wet rock. The gods needed to be appeased with sacrifices etc. Throughout the history of

humanity there have been a variety of different approaches, belief systems, religions used to help us cope with uncertainty. Basically, we seem to have a “God-shaped hole in our hearts” that can only be filled in one way. Worship, with prayer and meditation. Medication alone is not the answer. Interestingly the levels of imbalanced NT’s that were discussed above will tend to balance out over time with regular prayer, meditation & aerobic exercise. Have you ever heard the term of getting your life in balance? That’s what we’re talking about here!

Nobody can take a hot bath at the end of a stressful day if they go home, climb in the tub, turn on the hot water tap and forget to close the drain. The tub won’t fill; no soothing bath for you tonight!

By the same example, the NT imbalance is caused by a life out of balance. Medications work quickly and work well, but won’t work forever without a change in the harmful pattern of living that originally caused the imbalance. “Prozac poop-out” is a term that was invented several years after that drug was introduced. It worked great! For awhile. Some patients who were on it found that the effect seemed to wear off after a period of time. Higher doses helped, but over time, sometimes even that approach didn’t work adequately. All of these medications have this drawback when used alone.

Occasionally a patient will take offense to the notion that they need to work on their spiritual life. Notice that no mention is made of any religion here. Spirituality is your relationship with God however/whoever you perceive it to be. A clinician doesn’t need to tell you what to believe or who to worship, although they may share what works for them, it’s not a command that you follow their beliefs. Some doctors may even generously offer to pray for or with you. This is a free-will gift of theirs to you in the hopes of helping you--they are not paid to pray but want to help!

Anybody who has ever done something really good for another, perhaps anonymously, knows the “good feeling” that results. Similarly, anybody who’s really harmed another will frequently feel guilt and/or anxiety (although sometimes these feelings go away with repeated “bad behavior”). Perhaps that is our conscience’s way of talking to us. Perhaps it’s the fact that there is a supreme being who uses our emotions to communicate with us. Could anxiety, depression, insomnia & panic disorder be a result of such a communication from above because we’re heading down the wrong path with our lives? If so, all of the medication in the world won’t be enough until there is a change of the patients life-course.

A word of warning regarding medications that are used is in order as well. Some medications are potentially harmful:

Tranquilizers work on the GABA NT system. This is the same NT that alcohol works on. Valium and drugs of it’s kind are basically alcohol in tablet form. They mask but don’t correct the underlying problem. Patients will feel better for the short term and get worse in the long term, potentially becoming addicted to these drugs.

Antidepressants that work on Serotonin, Norepinephrine, Dopamine help to correct the underlying NT imbalance. These heal, not mask, and are not addictive.

Likewise, mood stabilizers and lithium also help with more difficult cases. Sometimes the various classes need to be used in combination. Again, healing, not masking/ addicting is a characteristic of these types of medication.

If the patient is using/abusing tranquilizers, alcohol, narcotic pain medications, amphetamines--even caffeine & nicotine can be counterproductive. Your doctor needs to know EVERYTHING that you are using in this regard. 12-Step programs can be very helpful for those who have tried to self-medicate but weren't able to resolve their issues. Self-medication generally is a sign that the patient has an unqualified fool for a doctor--him or herself! Professional help with counseling & medication work best with regular daily prayer and meditation.

There are a few other things that can also help.

The Alpha brain wave pattern is a very soothing & relaxing pattern that is recorded on the Electroencephalogram or EEG. Advanced practitioners of meditation know that this is a "target" to try to reach when practicing meditation. This pattern can be achieved easily with a little help from a handy little device. More information is available at www.alphastim.com for information on how to obtain the device. Basically, it simply consists of a battery powered small electrical device with two electrodes that clip to the ear lobes. The device triggers an imperceptible painless electrical charge in the alpha rhythm that then entrains the brain to enter the rhythm, which rapidly calms and relaxes the brain and rids patients of stress. It's amazing how quickly and easily it works. The device has an internal timer that can be set for 20 or 60 minutes. It's very effective.

Another approach involves EEG Neural Feedback. In this form of treatment, administered by a trained therapist, the brain can be mapped to show which areas of the brain are overactive or under-active. The EEG machine is interfaced with a computer that allows the patient to watch a video screen and literally play video games with their brain only "no hands"! The system advances them through the game when the target area of the brain is in the targeted rhythm/level of activity. In this way the brain patterns can be taught to correct themselves. This can be useful for autism spectrum disorders as well as a variety of other issues. To find a local source for this treatment, use a search engine such as Google and put in "your zipcode" "EEG Neural Feedback" with the terms in parenthesis, put in your local zipcode as above.

For folks who are afraid to use medications, there is a laboratory that can use an early morning urine specimen and analyze the different amino acids in the urine. NT's are formed from specific amino acids. The lab then can determine which NT's are high or low and provide supplements of amino acids to correct the NT imbalance. This has also been helpful for children with ADD/ADHD who's parents did not want them on stimulant medications. More information about this therapy can be obtained from; <https://www.neurorelief.com/index.php?p=home> .

Best wishes to you for a rapid recovery, remember to pray for your health team too!