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Managing Anxiety at Home: A Guide to Coping Strategies and Treatment Options

Anxiety is a natural response to stress, but when it becomes persistent, overwhelming, or interferes with your daily life, it requires proactive management. Balancing daily behavioral strategies with over-the-counter support and professional medical care can help you regain a sense of calm and control.

At-Home, Non-Medication Strategies

The foundation of managing anxiety begins with calming the nervous system and breaking the cycle of anxious thoughts. These evidence-based practices can be utilized anytime, anywhere:

Controlled Breathing Exercises

When anxiety spikes, your breathing naturally becomes shallow and rapid, signaling a "fight-or-flight" response to your brain. You can actively reverse this by practicing Box Breathing:

1. Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of 4.
2. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
3. Exhale completely through your mouth for a count of 4.
4. Pause and hold empty for a count of 4. Repeat this cycle 3 to 5 times.

Mindful Grounding (The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique)

Anxiety often pulls your mind into future "what-if" scenarios. Bring your awareness back to the present moment by identifying:

- 5 things you can see around you.
- 4 things you can physically feel (e.g., your feet on the floor).
- 3 things you can hear.
- 2 things you can smell.
- 1 thing you can taste.

Lifestyle Modification

- **Limit Caffeine and Alcohol:** Both substances can mimic or trigger physical anxiety symptoms, such as a racing heart, jitteriness, and disrupted sleep patterns.
 - **Regular Aerobic Exercise:** Physical activity burns off excess adrenaline and releases endorphins, which naturally elevate mood and reduce tension.
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Over the Counter (OTC) Options and Supplements

While there is no over-the-counter pill that cures anxiety, certain supplements and medications can help take the edge off physical tension or related sleep disturbances.

- **Magnesium Glycinate:** Known for its high absorption rate and muscle-relaxing properties, magnesium supports the nervous system and can promote a calmer state of mind.
- **L-Theanine:** An amino acid frequently found in green tea, L-Theanine helps promote relaxation without causing drowsiness.

- **Ashwagandha:** An adaptogenic herb that helps the body manage chronic stress by regulating cortisol levels over time.
- **A Note on Antihistamines:** Over-the-counter sleep aids or allergy medications containing diphenhydramine (Benadryl) are sometimes used for their sedative side effects to calm acute jitters. However, as noted in the [Five Common Medications to Avoid](#) guide, adults over the age of 65 should strictly avoid diphenhydramine due to risks of confusion, sedation, and increased fall risks.

Commonly Prescribed Medications for Anxiety

If lifestyle changes and over-the-counter support are not enough to manage your symptoms, a healthcare provider can prescribe targeted, highly effective daily or as-needed medications.

Medication Class	Common Examples	How It Works / Usage
SSRIs (<i>Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors</i>)	Sertraline (Zoloft), Escitalopram (Lexapro), Fluoxetine (Prozac)	The gold standard for long-term anxiety management. These are taken daily and take 4 to 6 weeks to build up in your system and become fully effective.
SNRIs (<i>Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors</i>)	Duloxetine (Cymbalta), Venlafaxine (Effexor)	Another daily maintenance option that balances neurotransmitters to manage generalized anxiety.
Beta-Blockers	Propranolol	Taken "as needed" to block adrenaline. They do not stop anxious thoughts, but they effectively stop the <i>physical</i> symptoms of anxiety (racing heart, shaking hands, sweating), making them ideal for performance or social anxiety.
Anxiolytics	Buspirone	A daily, non-habit-forming medication designed specifically for generalized anxiety disorder.
Benzodiazepines	Alprazolam (Xanax), Clonazepam (Klonopin), Lorazepam (Ativan)	Highly potent, fast-acting sedatives used <i>strictly for short-term or emergency relief</i> (such as acute panic attacks). Because they carry a high risk of dependence and tolerance, they are rarely prescribed for long-term daily use.

When to Seek Professional Support

Anxiety is highly treatable. You do not have to navigate it alone. Consider scheduling a consultation if your anxiety prevents you from sleeping, impacts your performance at work, strains your personal relationships, or results in sudden panic attacks.

Mental Health Emergency: If your anxiety escalates to a point where you feel completely hopeless, experience severe despair, or have thoughts of self-harm, please skip a standard appointment and reach out immediately to the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) by calling or texting 988. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP