

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Dedicated to increasing knowledge about safe and effective complementary and integrative medicine approaches.

Integrative Approaches to the Management of Anxiety and Depression

Ronald Glick, MD and Carol Greco, PhD

Why do patients seek out integrative approaches? We take penicillin for strep throat and have surgery for appendicitis. When people experience a chronic condition that is disabling, interferes with their quality of life, and does not respond to the usual medical therapies, they often consider complementary and integrative therapies.

What about depression and anxiety? Both conditions are disabling and both are becoming more prevalent. The lifetime prevalence, or likelihood of experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder over a person's lifetime, is 50%. Approximately half of all people who experience anxiety or depression have the onset during childhood or adolescence. Women are twice as likely as men to experience depression. In any given year, approximately 2/3 of people who suffer from depression experience severe impairment.

Why are these problems so common? The prevalence of anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric disorders has increased over the last several decades. As countries adopt a Western diet and lifestyle, they show a similar pattern. Presumably, this is due to a combination of societal, cultural, and environmental factors. An important contributor is diet. We eat a high percentage of our calories from prepared foods, simple carbohydrates, and animal fat, and not enough of our diet comes from plants. Even when a person tries to eat healthfully, our food chain may lack essential micronutrients. We've always been pulled in different directions, but in recent years people are more stressed and have fewer supports, further contributing to problems.

What are comorbidities and why should I care? Comorbidity means that a person has more than one health problem. One survey found that the average senior takes four medications per day, not counting over-the-counter meds. This suggests that having multiple health problems is very common. Mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are among the most frequently occurring comorbidities. They add greatly to disease burden, in terms the level of disability and to mortality related to other health issues.

How do we treat depression and anxiety? Standard treatments include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), a form of talk therapy, and medications, such as the serotonin antidepressants. Less than half of patients with anxiety or depression avail themselves of treatment. Of those who do receive treatment, many achieve an incomplete response or complain of adverse effects.

Why is it so hard to manage depression and anxiety?

- Depression and anxiety are often chronic conditions that occur on and off throughout a person's life. People may address a problem when it's severe and acute, but when symptoms recur, they may try to "tough it out" rather than returning to whatever treatment helped previously.
- Side-effects of medications may be bothersome, with symptoms such as weight gain, fatigue, sexual dysfunction, and blunting of mood. While most patients tolerate medications well, some say, "I'd rather have the depression than the side-effects".
- One of the problems with depression is a tendency towards hopelessness, which makes it less likely that a person will engage in treatment. The chronicity of symptoms, recurrence, or limited response to treatment may contribute to a sense of pessimism.
- Self-management approaches require time, and when feeling stressed, it may seem like there are more things to do than time available. One definition of stress is when the demands on a person exceed the resources available to manage them.

The importance of lifestyle: Patients with diabetes or heart disease learn that these are chronic problems that don't have a biomedical cure. In addition to medications, they require lifestyle management approaches. The big three are diet, exercise, and stress management. Other lifestyle factors that promote physical and mental health include maintaining a regular sleep-wake cycle and avoiding excessive use of substances. The question is, do these management activities help for depression and anxiety?

Eat a healthy diet: There is extensive research on the effect of diet on mood. Across these studies, the worse one's diet, the greater the likelihood of developing depression. Treatment studies are mixed. But overall, studies indicate that cleaning up one's diet may help for the management of depression. One possible mechanism is the effect of diet on the microbiome, or the mix of healthy vs. unhelpful or deleterious bacteria, in our guts.

Regular aerobic exercise: We're a sedentary society, which contributes to a host of chronic health conditions. Coupled with our poor diet, this lack of activity has created the obesity epidemic. Aerobic exercise, such as walking for a half-hour per day at a brisk pace, has been studied extensively in the management of multiple health conditions, anxiety disorders, and depression. For obesity, Dr. John Jakicic, here at the University of Pittsburgh, has studied the role of aerobic activity on weight reduction. He recommends 300 minutes per week, or one hour per day five days per week, of moderate intensity aerobic activity. For anxiety disorders, aerobic exercise has a comparable effect to CBT and medication. For individuals with obesity, aerobic exercise results in improved well-being, decreased psychological distress, and decreased fatigue.

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Engage in regular mind-body practice: At the Center for Integrative Medicine (CIM), we ask all our patients what they do to help with stress management. Common responses are: “I used to” do yoga, run, etc.; “I’m so wiped out at the end of the day that I collapse on the couch, watch TV, and pass out” or “I have a stiff drink.” Or, we get a blank stare. Many individuals say “I can’t meditate, my mind goes in so many different directions.” Those same patients are often surprised at the changes they experience when they immerse themselves in meditation. We try to help each person find a meditative practice that resonates with them. And hopefully, they find it so beneficial that they’re motivated to continue. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a mind-body intervention that has been carefully studied. Research has shown benefit for mood, anxiety, sleep, pain, quality of life, and many specific health conditions. We find that mindful awareness, or intentionally paying attention to present moment experience in a friendly non-judgmental way, can allow a person to observe their emotions, even unpleasant ones, with an allowing, accepting attitude. Over time, this can reduce reactivity to difficult circumstances and reduce suffering.

What other lifestyle and interpersonal approaches can a person take? Borrowing from the fields of **positive psychology** and **spiritual practice**, one can take practical steps which have the interesting side-effects of empowerment and improving mood:

- **Count one’s blessings:** Literally writing down several things that we’re grateful for each day can help shift a person’s mood and interactions.
- **Giving back:** When we’re feeling our worst, there’s a tendency to be inwardly focused. Engaging in acts of generosity or giving can take us out of our own heads.
- **Find purpose and meaning:** A common aspect of depression is lack of meaning or purpose in life, so activities that direct our energies and that are aligned with our values can have a positive effect on mood.
- **Connect socially:** With both depression and anxiety, there is a tendency to isolate. For depression, withdrawing or isolating oneself may be due to a lack of interest in usual social activities. And the withdrawal results in a lack of social support. For anxiety, there may be discomfort in social situations. Either way, acknowledging the challenge with an attitude of self-compassion, and moving toward social connections anyway can turn things around and help the underlying problem.

Besides pharmacology, what other biological approaches have an impact on brain chemistry?

- **Vitamins and minerals:** It makes sense that many of us, by virtue of diet or metabolism, are deficient in specific essential vitamins and nutrients. Research is helping us identify which individuals may have such deficiencies and may respond to these supplements.
- **Specific nutritional supplements:** Several agents have shown evidence of benefit. SAM-e (pronounced Sammy) and prescription strength methyl-folate in the form of Deplin® can significantly reduce symptoms of depression, either alone or in

combination with antidepressants. Inositol has been helpful for the management of anxiety disorders. These affect brain chemistry in a milder way than prescription medications and typically have fewer side effects.

- **Functional and naturopathic medicine approaches:** Within these approaches, a disturbance in one area, such as food intolerance, can lead to systemic or whole-body effects. A person may have nutritional deficiencies, dietary intolerance or allergies, abnormalities of gut microbiome, toxicity, and disturbance in the body’s neuroendocrine and immune systems. Functional medicine and naturopathic medicine approaches focus on diagnosing the problems or imbalances and addressing these with focused nutritional support and supplements.
- **Metabolic imbalances specific to mental health:** William Walsh, PhD is a chemist who developed a system of testing to identify metabolic imbalances that affect brain chemistry and contribute to chronic mental health disorders. The imbalances identified under the Walsh Protocol include: undermethylation, overmethylation, copper toxicity, zinc deficiency, and pyroluria. Each of these may be recognized through lab testing and may respond to treatment with targeted nutritional supplements.

Where should I invest my energy?

We see the greatest benefit from the combination of biological and self-management approaches. The biological part is commonly a medication, but it could involve supplements and nutrition. Often, the biological approach can jump-start things and provide the energy and impetus for a person to engage more actively in self-management approaches. From the standpoint of psychotherapy, CBT may be the gift that keeps on giving; a course of therapy can have lasting effects. For many people, lifestyle factors are an issue. We’re stressed, we’re sedentary, and our diet stinks. Lifestyle-oriented approaches are central in long-term management. When engaging in lifestyle and self-management approaches, the 1st step is the most important one. So, take that first step. We’re here to support you.

What resources are available?

- ⇒ There are a number of apps that can be helpful:
 - Beating the Blues—a CBT-oriented app, available through UPMC Health Plan
 - Headspace—a mindfulness app
 - Breatheroom™ —a spirituality-based app designed for management of depression
- ⇒ Health coaching—through UPMC Health Plan or through CIM.
- ⇒ Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction—This course is widely available in the US and abroad. The hub of mindfulness training in Pittsburgh is through CIM. Our course is taught by Dr’s. Carol Greco and Kelly Beck.
- ⇒ Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction—This course is taught by Dinnie Goldring, LCSW at CIM.
- ⇒ Functional Medicine consultation for patients 25 and under; and Naturopathic Medicine consultation for individuals of all ages, through CIM.
- ⇒ Integrative Psychology and Psychiatry treatment through CIM.

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New Year, New Opportunities — Check out our new groups!

EXPERIENCE THE POSITIVE HEALTH EFFECTS OF TAI CHI

Would you like to improve your circulation, coordination, posture, balance, and strength?

If so, join Jonathan Wilson for an 8-week Tai Chi series at
The Center for Integrative Medicine!



Classes are for beginners as well as those already familiar with the practice of Tai Chi. The curriculum will be based on the Wu Style 16-Posture Essential Form and is both accessible and beneficial to those of all fitness levels.

Tuesdays
February 12th through March 2nd
5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
\$80 for a 8-week session
Preregistration requested

Extensive research has been conducted around the benefits of Tai Chi, which include:

- improved balance and coordination
- decreased pain and limitations for individuals with arthritis
- improved flexibility and strength
- improvement in the heart and lung systems
- improved mood and sense of well-being

Call the Center for Integrative Medicine at **412-623-1203** to reserve a spot and/or for more information.

Group Health Coaching

with Angie Phares

A focus on Stress Management



Saturdays

January 12th through March 23rd
10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

\$175 for a 6-week session
Preregistration requested

This 6-week group health coaching series will teach you how make positive lifestyle changes using a step by step process. You will learn practical information on how to handle stress more productively in order to support your health. In addition to an education content, you will also practice setting achievable goals, determine how to incorporate these into your busy life, and learn from one another. We will create a supportive community with a common goal and have built in accountability with peers and your health coach. A mind-body stress reduction technique will be practiced at each session to build your stress management skill set. You will also receive a binder where you can keep all the program literature, reference material, and worksheets.

Angie Phares is a nationally certified Integrative Health and Wellness Coach, with her training completed with Duke University. She earned her Master's as a Physician Assistant with Baylor College of Medicine and is a certified Yoga instructor through the Himalayan Institute in Pittsburgh.

If you are interested in this group or a future series, please call Brittany at 412-623-1203 . When we have enough participants to run the group, we will reach out for payment.

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Research Announcements

The UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine is dedicated to increasing knowledge about the effectiveness and safety of complementary and integrative medicine approaches. Other integrative medicine modalities may not have been subjected to the same level of scientific inquiry as western medicine treatments. The Center for Integrative Medicine, in concert with the University of Pittsburgh, is actively pursuing research to support the benefits of these therapies.

Got Back Pain?

Are you:

- age 18 or older?
- currently experiencing low back pain?

You may be eligible for a University of Pittsburgh federally funded research study exploring different therapies to treat low back pain and prevent it in the future.

There is no cost to you to participate in this year-long study. Compensation will be provided.



To learn if you may qualify for a screening appointment, visit

www.pacback.org

2019 Classes at the UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Saturdays 1/12—3/23	10:00-11:30	Group Health Coaching—Stress Management (6 classes)	\$175	Angie Phares, PA
Mondays 2/11—4/1	6:30-9:00	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (8 classes)	\$325	Carol Greco, PhD
Tuesdays 2/12—4/2	12:00-1:45	Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (8 classes)	Ins.	Dinnie Goldring, LCSW
Tuesdays 2/12-3/2	5:00-6:00	Positive Effects with Tai Chi (8 classes)	\$80	Jon Wilson
Tuesdays 2/12—4/2	6:30-9:00	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (8 classes)	\$325	Kelly Beck, PhD

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**Happy New Year from
The Center for Integrative
Medicine!**

