

# Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

*Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.*

*The topic of Epilepsy and Anxiety will be done in two parts. Part 1 will be published this week, July 20<sup>th</sup>, and part 2 will be published next week, July 27<sup>th</sup>.*

Are you or somebody you know battling epilepsy and anxiety at the same time? Did you know that anxiety is comorbid with epilepsy? Anxiety can be quite substantial in the life of a person diagnosed with epilepsy. M J Jackson and D Turkington wrote in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry 2005 that epilepsy and anxiety are common disorders. It is therefore not surprising that these conditions coexist in a significant number of patients.

For a person living with anxiety, getting through the day is an achievement in and of itself. Both the person's mind and body are affected by anxiety. Likewise, it becomes a vicious cycle, with incessant worry and panicky thoughts, rapid heartbeat, or shakiness. Your thoughts can trigger these types of physical symptoms which lead to more panicky thoughts and more physical symptoms. It can be a challenge to break free of this pattern.

Dr. Michael Privitera, Director of the Epilepsy Center at the University of Cincinnati Gardner Neuroscience Institute conducted a study which suggested that stress, potentially linked to generalized anxiety or major depressive disorders, could fuel epilepsy and trigger seizures. Patients who believed that stress was having an effect on their epilepsy were labeled as "stress positive" and provided information regarding their experiences with epilepsy, level of stress, and history of depression or anxiety. There were a significantly lower amount of "stress negative" patients, who reported that stress did not effect their seizure activity. Interviews revealed that many of the patients had already tried a variety of stress-reduction techniques, such as yoga, and of those, "71% of them thought their seizures subsequently improved". In conclusion, the findings of Dr. Privitera's study suggested that not only could "stress positive" patients sometimes predict the onset of a seizure, but also demonstrated a correlation to higher levels of depression and anxiety (as quantifiable via GAD scores and Neurological Disorders Depression Inventory for Epilepsy).

Phylis Feiner Johnson stated that 10-32% of those diagnosed with epilepsy experience symptoms of anxiety. Moreover, Johnson says that for those whose epilepsy is determined to be intractable or cannot be controlled by meds, the likelihood of anxiety is even greater. Anxiety is often a dominant symptom of the adjustment disorder which most patients go through when first diagnosed with epilepsy. States of heightened anxiety can come to be self-reinforcing with an increase in seizure frequency. "Frequently, anxiety in epilepsy is viewed as a result of the unpredictability of seizures and is not treated," said Jana Jones, PhD, assistant professor in neuropsychology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison.

Anxiety in a person with epilepsy can be present for the following reasons:

- a reaction to the diagnosis of epilepsy.
- a side effect of seizure medications.
- fear of having a seizure that can occur at any time and place without a warning.
- fear of social rejection, bias, and discrimination.
- epilepsy may temporarily alter your brain chemistry in a way that causes more anxiety.

**The treatment of anxiety in a person with epilepsy should be based on a thorough investigation by a professional healthcare provider.** Some people do well with counseling. At Epilepsy Alliance Ohio we have excellent counselors. Patty Trotta ([Patty.Trotta@epilepsy-ohio.org](mailto:Patty.Trotta@epilepsy-ohio.org)) and Doug Simmons ([Doug.Simmons@epilepsy-ohio.org](mailto:Doug.Simmons@epilepsy-ohio.org)) are located at the Epilepsy Alliance Ohio office in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio. Others need more structured psychotherapy to reduce their experiences of anxiety. In some cases, anti-anxiety medications are used. For people with both epilepsy and anxiety, the neurologist may recommend seizure medicines that also have anti-anxiety effects. Treating both your epilepsy and your anxiety is always a smart idea.

Additional information about epilepsy and anxiety was found on the website Epilepsy center.org.au. For people with epilepsy there may be additional stressors associated with their condition. These additional stressors include:

- the need to take medication regularly.
- uncertainty about when a seizure will occur.
- difficulties gaining a driver's license and dependency on others.

If you are feeling anxious, trying the ideas below may help to calm you down. There are many therapies from which one can choose to help manage their anxiety. In this issue of the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog, you will see traditional remedies along with alternative strategies to help you manage your anxiety. A multi-pronged approach to treating anxiety is a good strategy to use. Remember, the remedies listed below may help you manage your anxiety, but they do not replace consulting with a qualified health care professional. Increased anxiety may require therapy or prescription medication. **Nevertheless, if your symptoms are severe, please consult a healthcare professional for proper treatment advice.**

The following tips were found in the article Overcoming Anxiety Without Medication: 10 Tips to Reclaim Your Happiness and the website <https://thepowerofhappy.com/anxiety-without-medication/>.

### **1. Analyze your food intolerances.**

Most people do not realize it, but food intolerances lead to anxiety. Many people who come across this information and eliminate the top offenders find that their anxiety is greatly reduced within a matter of weeks. The top offenders are gluten and wheat, dairy, eggs, corn, grains, and soy.

### **2. Get rid of the sugar immediately.**

Sugar has now been linked to anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. Many people do not realize just how much sugar they are eating, and most do not realize that it is contributing to their anxiety. Sugar can be hard to quit. If you want to reduce your anxiety, however, it is well worth it. Cravings normally subside within a few weeks and it becomes easy. See the book I Quit Sugar for help.

### **3. Reduce inflammation.**

We are learning that anxiety often stems from systemic inflammation within the body. Reduce inflammation and see if your anxiety subsides.

### **4. Practice breathing exercises.**

Learning proper breathing techniques can greatly help ease your anxiety. For instance, breathing from your diaphragm—slowly—and taking in full, deep breaths can make you feel calmer. Breathing from your chest or lungs, instead of your abdomen, can make you feel more nervous and stressed out. Likewise, there are a variety of deep breathing exercises that can be helpful. These include alternate nostril breathing, kundalini breathing, box breathing and other breathing techniques where you breathe in for a slow count, hold the breath and breathe out for a slow breath.

### **5. Get moving.**

Your body produces extra energy when it is anxious. Use that energy by moving your body so that the energy will not have a chance to build up and cause you even more anxiety. Get up and take a walk to release your body's excess adrenaline. Regular exercise works as well as medication to ease anxiety for some people. Gentle movement such as simple stretching, rocking, and moving hands and arms – can relax and calm the body. In John Ratey's book *Spark*, he details how physical exercise or activity can be just as effective managing your anxiety as any anxiety medication prescription. Regular exercise helps keep you fit and can induce better sleep and a healthy appetite. It often contributes to a sense of well-being, by providing a break from day-to-day worries, and gives a sense of control and achievement. **As always, before making any unilateral change in your treatment, you should consult with a qualified healthcare professional.**

### **6. Reduce your stress.**

This one might seem obvious, but it is amazing how many people do not work to reduce their stress. Figure out simple things you can do to plan or avoid stressful situations.

### **7. Try out some natural remedies.**

Turmeric, apple cider vinegar, magnesium, vitamin c and others have all been shown to help many people cope with and reduce their anxiety. Likewise, activities such as walking and yoga have helped people come out of anxiety. Try these out and find what may work for you.

### **8. Eliminate anxiety triggers.**

Like sugar, alcohol and caffeine can lead to chronic anxiety. Likewise, many prescription drugs have been said to cause anxiety. This is true of anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications. See *A Mind of Your Own* by Dr. Kelly Brogan, MD for more details on this. Further, even certain supplements can cause anxiety in some. For example, some people simply cannot handle certain B vitamins. Analyze your daily routine and see if there are anxiety triggers in there.

*Part two of the topic Epilepsy and Anxiety will be published next week.*

*Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly. Always remember – CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!*