



# Natural Remedies for Anxiety in Teens: A Christian Perspective

## Introduction

Anxiety in teenagers has become increasingly common, affecting about **1 in 4 adolescents** today <sup>1</sup>. For Christian teens, chronic anxiety can be especially distressing – not only are they weighed down by worry and fear, but they may also feel guilt for **“not having enough faith.”** It’s important to understand that clinical anxiety is *not* a spiritual failure; it is a real condition involving mind, body, and spirit. The Bible acknowledges anxiety as part of the human experience (*“An anxious heart weighs a man down,”* Proverbs 12:25), and offers hope for relief through both **spiritual support and practical action**. This article explores **natural remedies for anxiety in teens** – lifestyle changes, therapeutic techniques, and faith-based practices – that can be used alongside modern psychiatric approaches (therapy and, if needed, medication as a last resort) to help teens find peace. We will reinforce each strategy with **biblical wisdom** and **scientific research**, showing that caring for mental health is a wise and God-honoring endeavor.

## Understanding Anxiety in Teens

**Anxiety** is more than occasional worry; it’s a persistent sense of fear or dread that can interfere with daily life. In teens, anxiety often manifests as excessive worry about school performance, social situations, or the future. Common **symptoms** include racing heartbeat, sweating, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, upset stomach, and insomnia. Many anxious teens also develop avoidance behaviors (e.g. refusing social activities or school) as they try to escape the feelings of panic or dread. From a biological standpoint, anxiety triggers the body’s *fight-or-flight* response – the brain’s amygdala signals danger (even if no true threat exists), flooding the body with stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. This can cause physical sensations of panic and reinforce fearful thoughts, creating a vicious cycle of anxiety.

**How common is teen anxiety?** By all accounts, it is a widespread challenge. Surveys indicate roughly **20–30% of adolescents will experience an anxiety disorder** by age 18 <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>. In any given year, about 1 in 5 teens reports significant anxiety symptoms <sup>4</sup>. Girls tend to be affected more than boys – likely due to a mix of biological and social factors – with some studies finding nearly 38% of teen girls have an anxiety disorder <sup>5</sup>. Risk factors include genetics (family history of anxiety), personality (kids who are very perfectionistic or shy may be more prone), and stressful life events or trauma. Modern pressures like **academic stress, social media, world events**, and disrupted routines (such as during the COVID-19 pandemic) have also contributed to rising anxiety rates in youth <sup>6</sup>. The **good news** is that anxiety is very treatable. With early intervention, support, and healthy coping strategies, **most teens can learn to manage anxiety** and lead full, joyful lives <sup>7</sup>.

From a Christian perspective, it is vital to recognize that experiencing anxiety does *not* mean a person lacks faith or is spiritually failing. The Bible is actually full of godly individuals who battled fear and anxiety. For example, King David candidly wrote, *“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy”* (Psalm 94:19). The Apostle Paul, though a great hero of faith, admitted to arriving in ministry **“in weakness**



**and fear, and with much trembling**" (1 Corinthians 2:3). Even Jesus experienced deep anguish in Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion – *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,"* He said (Matthew 26:38). These examples show us that **feeling anxious at times is part of being human**, not a sign that one doesn't trust God. Where faith comes in is how we **respond** to anxiety. God invites us to turn to Him for help *in the midst* of anxious times. As we'll discuss, combining **spiritual practices** (like prayer and leaning on God's promises) with **natural remedies** and **professional guidance** can lead to significant relief and growth in faith. Teens should feel encouraged that overcoming anxiety is possible through a holistic approach – addressing the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects together.

## Biblical Encouragement and Spiritual Practices for Anxiety

One of the greatest resources a Christian teen has against anxiety is the comfort and guidance of **Scripture and prayer**. The Bible directly addresses worry and fear many times, offering both practical instructions and reminders of God's care. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,"* says Philippians 4:6-7, *"and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* This well-loved verse gives a clear **action plan**: rather than stewing in anxious thoughts, **turn your worries into prayers**. Talk to God honestly about what you fear, thank Him for the good things (gratitude itself can shift your mindset), and ask for His help. The promise is that God's peace will guard your heart and mind – a peace beyond what our rational brains can even figure out. Teens can make it a habit to "cast their cares" on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7) perhaps each night before bed, symbolically handing off their worries to God in prayer. Many have found that journaling prayers or reading some Psalms before sleep helps calm the mind, knowing that God is awake and in control so they can rest.

**Trusting in God's character** is key to the spiritual approach. Jesus spent a portion of the Sermon on the Mount addressing anxiety, compassionately telling His followers not to worry about life's needs because *"your heavenly Father knows that you need them"* (Matthew 6:25-34). He gave the analogies of birds fed by God and flowers clothed in beauty to illustrate God's faithful provision. *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own"* (Matt. 6:34). This teaching encourages teens to **live in the present day** and trust God one day at a time. Whenever anxious thoughts creep in about "What if X happens in the future?", they can counter that with *"God will be with me in that moment, just as He is with me today."* Memorizing a short promise like *"He will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5) or *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble"* (Psalm 46:1) can be a powerful way to ground oneself when panic rises. **Repeating Bible verses** to oneself is actually a form of healthy meditation – it refocuses the mind on **truth** rather than the catastrophic scenarios anxiety invents.

Another biblical strategy for anxiety is practicing **thanksgiving and praise** even when one doesn't *feel* like it. This might seem unrelated to worry, but it has a proven effect on mental state. The Psalms demonstrate this pattern: the writers often start by voicing fears or despair, but then deliberately recall God's past faithfulness and choose to praise Him, which shifts their mood to one of hope. For example, Psalm 42 finds David downcast and disturbed, but he essentially "talks back" to his anxious soul: *"Why, my soul, are you downcast? ... Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him"* (Psalm 42:5). **Praise and worship** can similarly help anxious teens by shifting focus off of their problems and onto God's greatness and love. Many young people testify that listening to worship music or singing at youth group brings a sense of peace that counteracts their anxiety. This is not just emotionalism – when we exalt God, we remind ourselves that He is bigger than whatever we fear. As Isaiah 26:3 promises, *"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You."*

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In addition to prayer and Scripture, **Christian fellowship** provides immense comfort. Simply knowing *“I’m not alone in this”* can reduce anxiety. Teens should be encouraged to share what they’re feeling with trusted believers – a parent, youth pastor, mentor, or close friend – who can pray for them and offer support. Galatians 6:2 instructs, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* There is something healing about talking to someone who listens without judgment. In fact, **recent research highlights the mental health benefits of involving faith communities** in care. One 2021 meta-analysis of 44 trials found that mental health interventions delivered by **“nonspecialists,” such as trained teachers or clergy, were often more effective than those by clinical specialists** in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression <sup>8</sup>. Many healthcare systems are taking note – for example, Northwell Health (New York’s largest health network) began training clergy in **“mental health first aid”** to help reach teens in need, given the shortage of professional therapists <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. This doesn’t mean pastors replace doctors, of course, but it shows the value of **spiritual counsel and community support** alongside medical care. A church youth group or Bible study can serve as a safe haven where a teenager feels seen, accepted, and reminded of God’s love, which powerfully combats the isolation and self-doubt anxiety can bring.

Finally, a vital spiritual practice is to continually **“renew the mind”** (Romans 12:2) by aligning our thoughts with God’s truth. Many cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques (discussed later) parallel biblical exhortations: identifying worried thoughts and replacing them with truth is akin to *“taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Teens can ask themselves, *“What is the lie my anxiety is telling me, and what does God say instead?”* For instance, anxiety might whisper *“Everything is going to fall apart, I can’t handle this,”* but God says *“Do not fear... I will strengthen you and help you”* (Isaiah 41:10). Writing a list of *“my anxiety says... / God says...”* can be a helpful exercise to visibly counter negative thoughts with scriptural truths. Over time, intentionally dwelling on God’s promises retrains the brain’s thought patterns towards peace. This spiritual **renewal of the mind** works hand in hand with the natural strategies we’ll explore next. God often calms our anxious hearts *through* practical means – encouraging healthy habits and wise actions that He has designed to foster wellbeing.

## Holistic Lifestyle Strategies for Anxiety Relief

Faith and prayer provide a foundation, but overcoming anxiety also involves stewarding our physical and mental health. God created us as holistic beings – **body, mind, and spirit** – so caring for one aspect benefits the others. Here we focus on **natural remedies and lifestyle changes** that research shows can reduce anxiety in teens. These methods are drug-free and generally accessible, making them ideal first-line interventions. By implementing these healthy habits, teens often notice their anxiety levels diminish and their overall resilience improve.

### Exercise and Physical Activity

One of the **most effective natural anxiety remedies** is **regular exercise**. Physical activity has a profound impact on the brain’s chemistry and the nervous system’s stress response. When you exercise (especially doing cardiovascular or aerobic activities), your body releases endorphins – neurochemicals that act as natural mood lifters and anxiety relievers. Exercise also reduces levels of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. In fact, even a single session of exercise can lead to **lower cortisol reactivity** to stressors shortly afterward <sup>11</sup>, helping your body return to a calm state more quickly. Studies have found that **teens who are less physically active tend to have higher rates of anxiety**, whereas those who get regular exercise report fewer anxiety symptoms <sup>12</sup>. There is evidence that sedentary behavior (like sitting for many



hours) is *prospectively associated* with increased anxiety symptoms over time <sup>12</sup> – meaning a lack of movement can actually contribute to feeling more anxious.

Why does movement matter so much? From a physiological perspective, anxious arousal (like a pounding heart and tense muscles) is essentially your body preparing to fight or run. Exercise provides an **outlet for this built-up tension**. It can relax muscle tension, deepen breathing, and improve sleep – all beneficial for calming an overactive stress response. Some researchers describe exercise as a **“reset”** for an anxious brain: it engages the **sympathetic nervous system** in a healthy way during activity, and then as you cool down, triggers the **parasympathetic nervous system** (the “rest and digest” system) to bring your body into a state of relaxation. Teens often find that even a short brisk walk or a few minutes of shooting hoops when they feel anxious can break the cycle of ruminating thoughts and release a lot of nervous energy. Over the longer term, consistent exercise may even help **regulate brain neurotransmitters** (like increasing serotonin and GABA, which have calming effects).

It’s not necessary to be a varsity athlete – **any physical activity counts**. Find something you enjoy: riding a bike, dancing in your room, skateboarding, swimming, playing soccer, doing active video game workouts, etc. Aim to get your heart rate up for at least **20-30 minutes a day**, and if possible, work up to the **60 minutes per day** of moderate-to-vigorous activity recommended by health experts <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>. (This 60-minute guideline is from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Physical Activity Guidelines for youth.) Unfortunately, most teens today aren’t hitting that target – **less than one in four high school students** gets an hour of physical activity daily <sup>15</sup>. But the good news is that *any* increase in exercise can help. Even a 10-minute walk can improve your mood and reduce tension in the moment. If 60 minutes straight sounds daunting, break it up into smaller chunks throughout the day (e.g. 20 minutes of walking in the morning, 20 of basketball at lunch, 20 of dancing in the evening). Make it fun by involving friends or listening to music. From a faith standpoint, caring for your body through exercise is a way to honor God – our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and instruments to serve Him. You might even combine exercise with prayer or worship music, turning a jog or gym session into a time to connect with God. **Research consistently shows** that active teens not only have lower anxiety, but also better overall mood and focus <sup>12</sup> <sup>16</sup>. By getting moving, you are stewarding the physical health God gave you and equipping yourself to better handle stress.

## Healthy Diet and Nutrition

**“We are what we eat”** may be a cliché, but there is growing evidence that nutrition affects mental health – including anxiety levels. The teenage brain and body are still developing and require a range of nutrients to function optimally. If a teen’s diet is heavily based on junk food, sugary snacks, and caffeinated drinks, they may be inadvertently aggravating their anxiety. **High sugar intake** and **excessive caffeine** can trigger or worsen anxious symptoms: sugar rushes (and crashes) can destabilize mood and energy, while caffeine is a stimulant that can cause jitteriness, heart palpitations, and insomnia in sensitive individuals. In fact, a *prospective study* by the CDC found that teens who consumed more **sugar-sweetened beverages** tended to develop greater severity of anxiety and depression symptoms over time <sup>17</sup>. Reducing soda/energy drink consumption and refined sugars can thus have a calming effect on the body’s chemistry. It’s wise for anxious teens to **limit caffeine** (found not only in coffee but also many sodas, energy drinks, iced teas, and even chocolate) – or avoid it entirely if they notice it triggers anxiety episodes. Swap in decaf alternatives or herbal teas (more on calming herbs shortly).



Beyond avoiding certain triggers, focusing on a **balanced, whole-food diet** can provide the building blocks for a stable mood. Research in “nutritional psychiatry” has identified correlations between **diet quality and mental health** in young people. For example, one large longitudinal study in Australia followed over 3,000 adolescents and found that those with **healthier diets (rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, etc.)** **had higher well-being scores**, while those with more **unhealthy diets (high in processed foods and sugary snacks)** **had worse emotional health** – and notably, changes in diet quality were mirrored by changes in mental health over time <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup>. In other words, when teens improved their diet, their anxiety and mood also improved, and when their diet deteriorated, so did their psychological state. This doesn't prove cause-and-effect definitively, but it strongly suggests that nutrition plays a supportive role in mental wellness. Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins and minerals that the brain needs to regulate neurotransmitters and stress hormones. For instance, **omega-3 fatty acids** (found in fish, walnuts, flaxseeds) have been linked to lower inflammation and anxiety; **magnesium** (found in leafy greens, nuts, whole grains) can have a calming effect on the nervous system; **B-vitamins** and **Vitamin D** (from sunlight exposure or supplements) are important for mood regulation. Some preliminary studies indicate that correcting a vitamin D deficiency or adding omega-3 supplements can modestly reduce anxiety in those who are deficient <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>, though more research is needed. The bottom line is that **fueling your body with wholesome foods** – plenty of vegetables and fruits, adequate protein, healthy fats, and water – creates a foundation for steadier energy and mood.

Practical steps for teens include: avoid skipping meals (low blood sugar can mimic anxiety symptoms like shakiness and irritability), incorporate protein and fiber (to stabilize blood sugar), and eat a variety of colorful produce to get a broad spectrum of nutrients. Keep healthy snacks on hand (fruit, yogurt, nuts) to avoid the temptation of candy or chips when stressed. **Hydration** is also key – even mild dehydration can cause heart rate and mood changes that feel like anxiety, so drinking water regularly is important. From a spiritual lens, we can view food as part of God's provision. *“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it”* (Psalm 24:1) – He provided natural foods to nourish us. Giving thanks before meals, as many families do, is a reminder that eating well is receiving a gift from God. It can also encourage mindful eating, which helps prevent the kind of frantic, stress-induced snacking that often leaves one feeling worse. In sum, while no specific “anti-anxiety diet” is officially prescribed, **eating healthfully supports better mental health**. Teens struggling with anxiety should pay attention to their nutrition as one piece of the wellness puzzle – it can make a noticeable difference in how they feel day to day.

## Adequate Sleep and Rest

It's hard to overstate the importance of **sleep** when it comes to mental health. Yet, many teenagers operate in a state of chronic sleep deprivation, which can significantly exacerbate anxiety. Experts such as the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the National Sleep Foundation recommend that teenagers (ages 13–18) get **8 to 10 hours of sleep per night** for optimal health <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup>. In reality, far too few are meeting that target. One survey found that by age 16, only about **19% of teens** were sleeping 8 or more hours on school nights <sup>24</sup> – meaning roughly four out of five teens are under-slept. This is a serious concern because **lack of sleep directly heightens anxiety** in the brain. When we're tired, the emotional regulation centers of the brain (like the amygdala) become more reactive, and the prefrontal cortex (which helps with reasoning and impulse control) is less effective. Ever notice how problems seem much more overwhelming and catastrophic late at night or after an all-nighter? That's the sleep deprivation amplifying anxiety.

Conversely, getting sufficient restful sleep can dramatically improve an adolescent's ability to cope with stress. **Studies have shown** that anxious youth often experience various sleep disturbances – shorter sleep



duration, poor sleep quality, frequent wakings, and longer time to fall asleep – compared to their non-anxious peers <sup>25</sup> . In fact, there appears to be a two-way relationship: anxiety can disrupt sleep, and poor sleep can worsen anxiety, creating a vicious cycle <sup>25</sup> . Breaking that cycle by prioritizing sleep is crucial. One study found there is even an optimal range of sleep that correlates with the lowest risk of anxiety and depression in teens, highlighting how important the *quantity* (and quality) of sleep is for mental well-being <sup>26</sup> . For teens who lie awake with racing thoughts, establishing a calming **bedtime routine** and good **sleep hygiene** is a natural remedy that can pay huge dividends.

Here are some **practical sleep tips** for anxious teens (and their parents to support them):

- **Keep a consistent schedule** – Our bodies crave routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at around the same times each day, even on weekends. Wild swings (staying up until 3am then sleeping until noon on Saturday) actually throw off your body clock and can make Sunday night insomnia worse. Consistency helps train your brain when to start winding down. Experts advise not varying wake-up time by more than ~1-2 hours on weekends <sup>27</sup> .
- **Create a wind-down routine** – About 30-60 minutes before bed, do relaxing activities **offline**. For example: dim the lights, take a warm shower or bath, put on comfy pajamas, and do something calming like reading (an actual book, not on a bright screen), gentle stretching, or listening to quiet music. Many teens find it helpful to spend a few minutes in prayer or reflective journaling – essentially “unloading” the day’s worries into God’s hands. This mirrors the biblical encouragement *“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you”* (Psalm 55:22). Writing down tomorrow’s to-do list and then setting it aside can also prevent ruminating in bed.
- **Eliminate electronics at night** – The blue light from screens (phones, tablets, computers, TVs) suppresses melatonin production, the hormone that makes you sleepy <sup>28</sup> . Scrolling social media or doing homework on a device right up until bedtime keeps your brain alert. Aim to **stop screen use at least 30 minutes before bed**. Consider charging your phone outside the bedroom at night to avoid the temptation (and late-night notifications). If you must use a device, use night mode or blue light filters, but zero is best. In one survey, over 89% of teens keep devices in their bedroom, which contributes to poor sleep <sup>28</sup> . Try treating your bed as a “screen-free zone.”
- **Optimize the sleep environment** – Make your bedroom as **dark, cool, and quiet** as possible. Darkness cues the brain to produce melatonin. Use blackout curtains or an eye mask if needed. Keep the temperature on the cooler side (around 65°F/18°C is often recommended) <sup>29</sup> , since our body temperature naturally drops at night. Earplugs or a white noise machine can help drown out disruptive noises if you live in a loud household. Also, reserve the bed *just* for sleep (and maybe calm reading) – not for doing homework or watching horror movies. You want your mind to associate lying in bed with relaxation, not with stressful activities <sup>30</sup> .
- **Watch out for late-day stimulants** – As mentioned, caffeine can interfere with sleep. Even if you can fall asleep, caffeine can reduce sleep quality. So avoid caffeinated drinks in the afternoon/evening. Also be mindful of heavy meals or intense exercise right before bed; these can wake up the body. Opt for a light snack if you’re hungry at night (a complex carb like whole-grain cereal or a banana) which can actually aid sleep <sup>31</sup> .
- **Don’t lie in bed tossing and turning** – If you can’t fall asleep after ~20-30 minutes, anxiety may start spiking (“I’ll be exhausted tomorrow if I don’t sleep *now!*”, etc.). It’s often better to get up and do a quiet, boring activity under low light (like read a textbook chapter or do a puzzle) until you feel sleepy, then try again. Avoid clock-watching; turn the clock away so you’re not fixating on the time <sup>32</sup> .



By following these strategies, teens can create a more **sleep-friendly lifestyle**. Improved sleep often yields noticeable reductions in anxiety – better concentration, more emotional stability, and fewer stress outbursts. From a faith angle, **rest is a gift from God**. The Bible encourages rest: *“In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat – for He grants sleep to those He loves”* (Psalm 127:2). Even Jesus took time to sleep and withdraw from crowds to rest, showing it’s not only okay but necessary to recharge. When we prioritize sleep, we acknowledge our human limits and trust God to take care of things while we’re “off duty.” Teenagers who invite God into their rest – for instance, praying something like, *“Lord, I trust You with my cares tonight. Please grant me peaceful sleep”* – often find a sense of release that combats insomnia. In sum, **adequate sleep is one of the simplest, yet most powerful natural remedies for anxiety**. It may require some discipline to break late-night habits, but the payoff in lowered anxiety is well worth it.

## Mindfulness, Breathing Techniques, and Relaxation

In recent years, **mindfulness practices** have gained popularity as effective, drug-free ways to manage anxiety. Mindfulness is essentially the skill of paying attention to the present moment in a calm, nonjudgmental way. Instead of our mind racing about yesterday or tomorrow, we anchor it in the *now*. This can be done through meditation exercises, guided imagery, breathing techniques, or even mindful prayer. For Christian teens, certain forms of mindfulness may feel unfamiliar if they’re associated with Eastern religions, but the core idea of stilling our thoughts and focusing is actually compatible with biblical meditation (Psalm 46:10 says *“Be still, and know that I am God”*). One can practice mindfulness by quietly meditating on a scripture or observing one’s breathing as a gift from God. The goal is to interrupt the spiral of anxious thoughts and bring one’s attention to the present, acknowledging feelings without panicking over them.

One of the **simplest and most immediate calming tools** is **deep breathing**. When anxiety strikes, breathing often becomes shallow and fast, which further signals to the brain that something is wrong (contributing to dizziness or tingling). By deliberately **slowing down and deepening your breath**, you activate the vagus nerve – a major nerve that triggers the parasympathetic “relaxation” response. Research confirms that controlled breathing can quickly reduce physiological stress. For example, a 2023 Stanford University study demonstrated that just **5 minutes a day of a specific breathing exercise** called “cyclic sighing” significantly lowered anxiety and improved mood in participants <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup>. This exercise involves inhaling gently, taking a second quick inhale to fully inflate the lungs, then a long, slow exhale through the mouth. The focus on a **prolonged exhale** is key, as exhaling is what especially engages the calming parasympathetic nervous system <sup>35</sup>. In the study, those doing daily deep breathing actually had greater reductions in anxiety and negative emotions than even a group practicing traditional mindfulness meditation <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup>. It’s encouraging that something as accessible as breathing can make a measurable difference. Teens can try this right now: take a slow breath in through your nose for a count of 4, then exhale through your mouth for a count of 6 or 7. Repeat that for a few minutes. Most people notice they feel at least a bit less tense. **Box breathing** (inhale 4 seconds – hold 4 seconds – exhale 4 – hold 4, then repeat) is another popular technique that Navy SEALs and athletes use to stay calm under pressure.

Many Christian teens also use **breath prayers**, an ancient practice where you say a short prayer phrase in rhythm with your breathing (for example, mentally saying “Lord, fill me with Your peace” on the inhale and “I cast my cares on You” on the exhale). This combines deep breathing with faith focus, and can be profoundly comforting in anxious moments. Ultimately, the exact technique matters less than the principle: **slowing your breathing** and intentionally relaxing signals your brain that it can dial down the alarm. This is a God-given mechanism in our bodies to regain calm.



Other **relaxation techniques** worth trying include **progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)** and **guided imagery**. In PMR, you systematically tense and then release each muscle group in your body (from toes to head), which helps identify and melt away physical tension. It's often used in therapy for anxiety and has been shown to reduce symptoms when practiced regularly. Guided imagery involves visualizing a peaceful scene (like a beach or meadow) in rich detail, engaging multiple senses – a form of directed daydreaming that can distract from anxiety and induce relaxation. There are many free recordings and apps that walk listeners through PMR or calming visualizations. These can be useful at night if worrying makes it hard to sleep, or anytime stress is high.

**Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs)** specifically tailored for adolescents have shown promising results in research. A review in *Frontiers in Psychology* noted that even though formal studies in teens are relatively new, MBIs consistently show **reduction in anxiety symptoms among adolescent populations** and high acceptability (teens generally are willing to participate and find it helpful) <sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup>. This has been tested particularly with **social anxiety** in teens, where mindfulness helps break the cycle of avoidance and negative self-focus <sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup>. By learning to observe anxious thoughts or physical sensations *without* immediately reacting with panic, teens gain a sense of control. It's like watching ocean waves – you learn to ride them out rather than be swept under. Therapists sometimes incorporate mindfulness into cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxiety, teaching skills such as **acceptance** (acknowledging “I feel anxious, and that’s okay, it will pass”) and **grounding techniques** (focusing attention on something concrete like the feel of a chair or the sounds in the room to get out of one’s own head).

For a Christian, a similar concept is found in Philippians 4:8 – “*Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*” This could be seen as guidance for a form of *mindful refocusing*. When anxiety floods the mind with worst-case scenarios, we can gently redirect our thoughts to something good – perhaps a favorite worship song, a comforting scripture, or recalling an instance of God’s faithfulness. **Gratitude journaling** is another practice gaining evidence for reducing anxiety: writing down 3 things you’re thankful for each day can shift your mental landscape over time. It aligns with 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “*give thanks in all circumstances,*” and has psychological benefits of increasing optimism and reducing stress reactivity.

In summary, incorporating **mindfulness and relaxation exercises** into daily life can significantly help teens manage anxiety naturally. These techniques calm the nervous system and train the mind to break free from constant worry. They are also easily paired with spiritual practices – prayer, scriptural meditation, worship – making them very accessible for Christian youth. Even 5–10 minutes per day of deep breathing or quiet meditation can build mental resilience. As Psalm 131:2 beautifully illustrates, “*But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother...*” – we too can quiet our souls in God’s presence, using the tools of breath and stillness that He designed our bodies to respond to.

*A colorful mural of open hands reaching out, symbolizing the support and hope offered to those struggling with anxiety. Within a caring community, teens can find encouragement and understanding. Churches and youth groups often provide safe spaces for teens to share their worries, pray for one another, and receive guidance rooted in love. This kind of social and spiritual support can significantly buffer a teen against the pressures of anxiety, reminding them they are never alone in their struggles.*



## Supportive Relationships and Community

Human beings are created for **connection**, and for teenagers, having a strong support system is crucial in navigating anxiety. As the image above suggests, reaching out and **accepting help** can lift a great weight off an anxious teen's shoulders. One of the worst things anxiety does is make a person feel isolated and misunderstood – but **sharing the burden** with others transforms the experience. Scripture encourages community care: *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Galatians 6:2). Teens should be reassured that it's not only okay to ask for help, it's part of God's design for us to support each other.

Numerous studies back up the protective power of relationships. Research has identified that **protective factors against anxiety** in youth include *“positive peer and adult role models, parental monitoring, and acceptance and support by peers.”*<sup>42</sup> In plain terms, when a teen knows **“I have people who care about me and believe in me,”** they are less likely to be overwhelmed by anxiety and more likely to bounce back from challenges. Family support is fundamental – open communication with parents or guardians about what the teen is feeling can help the whole family make adjustments (for example, reducing criticism, creating a calmer home routine, or seeking professional help together). Parents don't need to have all the answers; often just listening empathetically and validating a teen's feelings (“I hear that you're really worried and I understand why”) can provide enormous relief. It's equally important for parents not to dismiss a teen's anxiety with *“just pray more”* or *“snap out of it.”* Instead, they can affirm that **anxiety is real** and they are proud of their teen for facing it. Engaging in activities together – whether it's nightly walks, doing a devotional, or a fun outing – can also help a teen feel less alone.

Beyond family, **friends and mentors** play a key role. Encouraging your teen to stay involved in social activities, even when anxiety tempts them to withdraw, is important. Isolation can worsen anxiety, while positive social interactions release oxytocin and other neurotransmitters that combat stress. A caring **youth pastor, coach, or teacher** can serve as a mentor figure who provides guidance and a listening ear. Many churches have youth leaders trained (or at least experienced) in helping teens with common struggles like anxiety. Sometimes a young person might open up to a mentor about worries they find hard to discuss with parents, so it's valuable for them to have that outlet.

**Faith-based community** has unique benefits as well. Being part of a church or youth group introduces teens to a culture of compassion and hope. Group Bible studies or support groups specifically for anxiety (some churches or Christian counselors run anxiety support groups for teens) can normalize their experiences. Just hearing another teen say, *“I struggle with anxious thoughts too,”* can lift a huge psychological burden of feeling “weird” or “broken.” Together, they can pray for each other and share testimonies of what has helped. **Service projects** through church can also help anxious teens by shifting focus outward – helping someone in need often reduces one's own anxiety and builds a sense of purpose. For instance, volunteering at a food bank or visiting the elderly as a youth group can remind a teen that they can make a difference, countering feelings of helplessness.

In recent years, the mental health field has begun formally recognizing the importance of **spiritual and community support**. As mentioned earlier, some healthcare providers partner with faith communities to address mental health gaps<sup>9 10</sup>. Pastors and trained lay counselors (sometimes called *biblical counselors* or *Stephen Ministers* in churches) can provide ongoing encouragement that complements what a therapist might do. While a pastor is not a replacement for professional therapy in serious cases, **spiritual counsel** can reinforce a teen's coping toolkit with things like prayer, scriptural insights, and reassurance of God's love. Notably, a study from a leading health system found that interventions by clergy or community



members were **effective in preventing and treating anxiety** – leading that system to recruit more clergy in their mental health strategy <sup>8</sup>. This underscores that caring community members *can* make a difference.

From a biblical viewpoint, **fellowship is therapeutic**. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 states, *“Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.”* When a teen feels like they are “falling” into anxiety, a friend who checks in on them or a small group that prays over them can be the hand that helps them up. The church is sometimes described as a **“hospital for the hurting,”** and indeed many people have found healing through the church community’s support. It’s important for a teen to know that *needing others is not a weakness*; rather, it’s how God made us. Encourage your teen to identify at least one or two trusted people they can reach out to when anxiety becomes overwhelming. It might be as simple as texting a friend *“hey, I’m really anxious about this exam, could you pray for me?”* or letting their youth leader know they’re struggling so extra encouragement is given. These small connections can interrupt the loneliness and fear that fuel anxiety.

In practical terms, **building a support network** might involve: attending a youth group weekly, having a mentor or accountability partner, engaging in family meals or devotions where feelings are shared, and possibly seeing a Christian counselor (more on counseling next). Parents can facilitate this by helping their teen schedule social time (even if it’s just inviting a friend over to hang out) and by modeling supportive relationships in their own lives. The goal is that no teen feels they have to fight anxiety on their own.

To summarize, **community support is a powerful “natural remedy” for anxiety**. It doesn’t come in a pill or a bottle, but in the form of people who care. For a Christian teen, knowing that **the Body of Christ** is there to lift them up can instill hope and resilience. Together with others, their fears become more manageable. And as Jesus said, *“For where two or three gather in My name, there am I with them”* (Matthew 18:20) – there is a special strength and peace that comes when we gather and invite Christ into our midst, even into our anxious moments.

## Creative Outlets and Recreation

Engaging in **creative and enjoyable activities** is another natural way to alleviate anxiety in teens. Anxiety often causes a narrow focus on worries; creativity and play broaden a teen’s focus and give an emotional release. **Art, music, writing, sports, hobbies** – these are not just “extras,” but can be integral to an anxiety management plan. For example, some teens find that keeping a **journal** is therapeutic: writing out their feelings or even writing stories/poetry can serve as an outlet for pent-up emotions. Others express themselves through **art** – drawing, painting, doodling, or crafting. Art therapy research has found that creative expression can reduce stress hormones and anxiety levels by externalizing inner feelings in a tangible form (and one doesn’t have to be “good” at art to benefit; it’s about the process, not the product). Similarly, **making music** or simply listening to calming music can lower heart rate and induce relaxation responses in the brain. King Saul in the Bible was relieved from distressing feelings when the young David played the harp for him (1 Samuel 16:23), illustrating how music can minister to a troubled spirit.

Another aspect is **spending time in nature**. Many people notice that being outdoors – walking in a park, hiking, gardening, or even just sitting under a tree – helps them feel calmer. Research on **ecotherapy** supports this: natural environments tend to reduce cortisol and muscle tension compared to urban environments. Nature showcases God’s creation and can remind teens of God’s grandeur and care (Matthew 6:26-29 again: Jesus pointed to the birds and flowers as examples of God’s provision, perhaps

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while standing outdoors). Encouraging anxious teens to get some sunshine and fresh air daily can uplift their mood. Even the exercise of walking the dog or watering plants counts, combining gentle physical activity with nature exposure.

**Recreation and humor** are also underrated tools against anxiety. The Bible says *“A cheerful heart is good medicine”* (Proverbs 17:22). Laughing with friends, watching a clean comedy, or playing a fun game can physiologically counteract stress by releasing endorphins and relaxing muscles. Anxiety makes things feel dire; laughter reminds us life still has joy and silliness. Teens should make room in their schedule for *fun* – not as an escape from responsibilities but as a necessary recharge. Sometimes in the push for productivity and achievement, we forget that teens (and all of us) need leisure to stay mentally healthy.

These outlets work best when tailored to the individual teen’s interests. If a teen loves basketball, shooting hoops in the driveway when anxious could be their go-to calming activity. If they love baking, whipping up some cookies when stress hits could channel nervous energy into a creative act (and produce a tasty reward!). If they love reading, curling up with a good novel can transport their mind away from worries for a while. **Encourage balance:** time for work and study, but also time for hobbies and rest. This aligns with the biblical principle of Sabbath – taking regular time to rest and delight in God’s gifts.

It’s also worth mentioning **helping others** as a meaningful activity. Volunteering or doing something kind for someone can provide a sense of purpose and perspective that shrinks one’s own anxieties. For example, a teen struggling with anxiety might volunteer at an animal shelter; caring for the animals can be soothing and shifts focus outward. Or helping a younger student with homework could boost their confidence. Many teens report that when they step out of their comfort zone to serve, they end up feeling more empowered and less anxious about their own issues.

In conclusion, incorporating **creative and recreational outlets** is a valuable part of a holistic approach to anxiety. These activities replenish a teen’s emotional reserves and interrupt cycles of rumination. God has given each person talents and interests not only for future careers, but for enjoyment and refreshment. As 1 Timothy 6:17 says, God *“richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”* Taking time to do what you love can be a form of self-care that honors that gift. For a teen weighed down by anxiety, rediscovering a beloved hobby or picking up a new one (with no pressure to be perfect at it) can rekindle hope and a sense of identity beyond “the anxious student.” It reminds them that they are *more* than their anxiety – they are creative, capable individuals made in the image of a creative God.

## Counseling and Therapy: Professional Help Without Medication

While lifestyle changes and spiritual support lay the groundwork, **professional counseling** is often a game-changer for teens with moderate to severe anxiety. Modern psychotherapy provides structured tools and techniques that can greatly relieve anxiety symptoms and teach lifelong coping skills. The idea of seeing a “therapist” might feel intimidating or stigmatized to some Christian families, but it shouldn’t be – counseling is essentially guided wisdom and mentorship for mental health, something Proverbs 11:14 hints at: *“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”* Wise, trained counselors (including Christian counselors who integrate faith) can be a godsend in an anxious teen’s journey.

The **gold standard therapy** for anxiety disorders in youth is **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** <sup>43</sup> <sup>7</sup> . CBT is a short-term, skills-focused therapy that typically lasts about 12–16 weekly sessions (though it can be adapted as needed). The premise of CBT is that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected.

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By learning to **identify and challenge anxious thoughts** and gradually **face feared situations**, teens can significantly reduce their anxiety over time. For example, a teen with social anxiety might have the thought “Everyone will judge me if I give that presentation in class.” In CBT, the therapist would help the teen examine that thought: what’s the evidence for and against it? Is it possible some people won’t judge and even if some do, does it truly mean catastrophe? They might generate a more balanced thought like “Some classmates might not pay much attention at all, and even if I stumble, it doesn’t mean I’m a total failure.” Alongside cognitive restructuring, CBT uses **exposure therapy** – gently and systematically having the teen **practice confronting their fears** instead of avoiding them. Avoidance provides short-term relief but long-term it makes anxiety worse (because the teen never learns that the feared outcome often doesn’t happen or is manageable). With a therapist’s guidance, the teen would take **small steps** toward their fear. In the social anxiety example, first the teen might practice giving a speech alone at home, then in front of a parent, then a few friends, and eventually in class. Over time, the fear response diminishes through repeated exposure, a process known as *habituation*. The teen also gains confidence as they see they can survive the situation.

CBT covers a toolkit of other techniques as well: **relaxation training** (like the breathing and PMR we discussed, which therapists teach), **problem-solving skills**, and sometimes **reward systems** for brave behaviors. Parents are often involved in youth CBT to learn how to best support and not inadvertently reinforce the anxiety (for instance, a therapist might coach parents to gradually stop accommodating every avoidance behavior, with love and encouragement).

How effective is CBT? Research has consistently shown it’s highly effective for youth anxiety. Meta-analyses of dozens of studies find that **about 60%–80% of kids and teens respond significantly to CBT** for anxiety <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> . One major study found **77% of participants** showed significant improvement in anxiety symptoms after CBT, compared to before treatment <sup>46</sup> . And in trials comparing CBT to a waitlist, about **47–50% of youth** achieved full remission of their anxiety disorder with CBT by the end (versus ~20% remission in those who got no treatment) <sup>47</sup> . Those are encouraging odds. Importantly, the benefits of CBT tend to **persist**. Follow-up studies indicate that many youth maintain their gains months or years later, especially if they continue to apply the strategies learned <sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> . Some may experience recurrence of anxiety in the future (life brings new challenges), but often they and their families can nip it in the bud with booster sessions or self-guided refreshers on CBT skills.

For a Christian teen, a special benefit is that **CBT techniques harmonize with biblical principles** about managing thoughts and behaviors. It doesn’t require any conflict with one’s faith; in fact many Christian counselors practice CBT integrated with scriptural truths. For example, when teaching a teen to counter negative thoughts, a Christian counselor might incorporate “*What does God say about this fear?*” alongside the standard evidence-based questions. Prayer can be included in sessions if the teen is comfortable. There’s also a variant called **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Religious content (CBT-R)** which has shown that explicitly using a client’s spiritual beliefs in therapy can be as effective as standard CBT <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> . So families should know that therapy is not a “secular only” tool – they can absolutely find therapists (through organizations like the **American Association of Christian Counselors**) who respect and utilize their faith. That said, even a competent non-faith-based therapist can be very helpful, and the teen/family can privately integrate faith on their end.

Aside from CBT, there are other therapies depending on the specific needs: **Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP)** is the go-to for obsessive-compulsive disorder; **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)** can help if anxiety is paired with big mood swings or self-harm urges (more common in older teens); **Trauma-**



**focused therapies** (like EMDR or TF-CBT) are critical if the anxiety stems from trauma. **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** is another approach gaining ground, which teaches mindfulness and aligning actions with values (some teens who don't resonate with CBT's style might like ACT). A good therapist will tailor the approach to the individual. The encouraging news is that **multiple therapeutic approaches can work**, and seeking help sooner rather than later tends to lead to better outcomes <sup>7</sup>.

A frequent question: *"When should we seek professional help for our teen's anxiety?"* The answer: if anxiety is **significantly impairing** the teen's life (for instance, causing them to refuse school, isolate from friends, have panic attacks, or sink into despair), it's time to get an evaluation from a mental health professional (psychologist, licensed counselor, or child psychiatrist). Also, if you've tried self-help strategies and things aren't improving (or are worsening), a therapist can provide new insight and structure. Therapy is not just for extreme cases; it can also help moderately anxious teens prevent escalation.

Another aspect is **online therapy** or **apps** that have emerged. There are CBT-based programs online that some teens use if local therapy isn't available, and studies show they can be effective, though dropout rates can be higher without in-person accountability <sup>52</sup>. Some popular anxiety apps include Headspace (for meditation), Calm, or specific CBT apps. These can be good supplements, but typically a live therapist is preferred for accountability and personalization.

Let's not forget the **role of parents** in therapy. Often, family sessions or parent training are part of treating child/adolescent anxiety. Parents can learn not to inadvertently reinforce avoidance, and how to give positive support for brave behaviors. A unified approach at home and in therapy yields the best results. For instance, if a teen is working on facing their fear of driving, the therapist might assign a practice drive each week with a parent, gradually increasing challenge, and the parent learns to coach calmly instead of overreacting or allowing avoidance. Teamwork is crucial.

To illustrate therapy's impact, consider a quick **real-world example**: A 15-year-old girl, "Sara," had crippling panic attacks whenever she tried to go to school. Over a year, her attendance dropped and she was almost homebound. Her parents engaged a CBT therapist. In therapy, Sara learned that her panic, though terrifying, was not truly dangerous – it was her body's alarm misfiring. She practiced interoceptive exposure (exercises that simulate panic sensations, like spinning in a chair to feel dizzy, to learn those feelings are not actually harmful). She also identified catastrophic thoughts (like "I will faint and die in class") and challenged them ("I might feel like I'll faint, but I never actually have; panic always passes; even if I fainted, it's treatable"). The therapist coordinated with the school to gradually reintroduce Sara – first just driving by the school, then sitting in the parking lot, then attending one class, etc. Each step was hard, but she had learned breathing techniques and grounding tools to cope. Her parents provided steady encouragement and stopped allowing avoidant excuses. After 3 months, Sara was back in full-time school. By 6 months, her panic attacks had reduced by 90%. One year later, she was managing stress well and considering *helping* others with anxiety. This example mirrors outcomes often seen in clinics: with professional help, a teen can go from nearly immobilized by anxiety to **thriving**, equipped with skills to handle future challenges.

In summary, **therapy is a valuable component** of treating teen anxiety, and it aligns with the Christian view that we should seek wise counsel and utilize knowledge. We believe God is the source of all truth – including psychological truth – so learning cognitive and behavioral strategies is essentially learning truths about how to think and act more effectively. There should be no shame in seeing a therapist; it's analogous to seeing a tutor when you need help in a subject, or a doctor when you have an illness. Many pastors will refer congregants to professional counselors for this reason, recognizing that prayer and therapy together



can do more than either alone. For a teen, having an objective, trained person to talk to (who isn't a parent or teacher) is often a huge relief. They can be honest about fears without worrying about burdening family or being judged. And a good therapist will empower the teen to become their own therapist eventually – meaning the skills they learn will serve them for a lifetime, long after therapy ends.

## Natural Medicines and Herbal Remedies: Use Caution

When we talk about “natural” remedies for anxiety, many people wonder about **herbal supplements** or vitamins that might help. Indeed, a variety of herbs and nutrients have been traditionally used to calm nerves – such as **chamomile, lavender, valerian root, passionflower, lemon balm**, and **magnesium**. It's important to approach these with balanced caution. Just because something is “natural” doesn't automatically mean it's safe or effective; however, some do have research supporting mild to moderate benefits for anxiety.

**Chamomile**, for example, is a common herbal tea known for its soothing properties. Limited clinical data suggests that short-term use of chamomile can modestly lessen anxiety symptoms in some individuals <sup>53</sup>. It's generally safe for most teens as a tea and can be part of a calming bedtime routine. (A warm cup of chamomile tea in the evening, perhaps while reading scripture or journaling, can signal the brain to relax.) Just be aware that chamomile is in the ragweed family, so people with ragweed allergies should avoid it to prevent allergic reactions <sup>54</sup>.

**Lavender** is another popular remedy – used either as an essential oil for aromatherapy or in oral supplements. **Lavender aromatherapy** (inhaling the scent via a diffuser or on a pillow) has some evidence of short-term anxiety reduction. It's pleasant for many and generally harmless to try (just use pure essential oils safely – a few drops, not ingesting them). **Oral lavender oil (supplements)** have been used in Europe for anxiety (a preparation called Silexan showed efficacy in some trials). However, here's a critical point for teens: **oral lavender is *not* recommended for children or adolescents**, because it can disrupt hormone levels during development <sup>55</sup>. There have been cases linking lavender products to hormonal effects like breast growth in prepubertal boys (when used chronically). So, teens should *avoid consuming* lavender oil capsules. Stick to aromatherapy use, which studies suggest can have a calming effect without the systemic risks <sup>56</sup>.

**Passionflower** is an herb that a few small studies have indicated might reduce anxiety, possibly comparable to low-dose benzodiazepines in short-term use <sup>57</sup>. It's sometimes found in herbal combination supplements or teas. Passionflower appears *likely safe for short-term use* in teens, though it can cause drowsiness or dizziness in some <sup>57</sup>. It's definitely *not* a stand-alone cure, but some find it takes the edge off mild anxiety. If used, it should be taken as directed and not combined with other sedatives.

**Valerian root** is more known as a sleep aid, but since anxiety and insomnia often go hand-in-hand, it's worth mentioning. Valerian has mixed evidence – some people report it helps them feel calmer or sleep better, others feel no effect <sup>58</sup>. It generally takes a couple weeks of use to notice effects and should only be used short-term (a few weeks at a time) unless a doctor approves longer. Side effects can include headache or morning grogginess. Valerian smells quite pungent (like old socks) which some teens may find intolerable! Again, if a teen tries it, supervision and sticking to recommended doses is important.

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*) is an herb often included in “calming” tea blends or supplements. Preliminary research indicates it might help with symptoms like nervousness and excitability <sup>59</sup>. It's usually

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well tolerated, but high doses could theoretically upset the stomach. Lemon balm tea is a gentle way to consume it and is caffeine-free, making it a nice evening option.

On the **nutrient** side, some supplements like **magnesium**, **L-theanine**, or **L-lysine/L-arginine combination** have been explored for anxiety. Magnesium (particularly in glycinate form) can have muscle-relaxing effects and some small studies suggest it helps anxiety, especially if the person is low in magnesium. L-theanine, an amino acid from green tea, promotes relaxation without drowsiness; it's what gives green tea a calming quality despite caffeine. It's available as a supplement and some teens use it for test anxiety or daily stress (100-200mg). L-lysine and L-arginine (amino acids) in combination showed some anxiolytic effect in a study <sup>60</sup>, possibly by influencing neurotransmitters, but this isn't widely used clinically.

It must be emphasized: **Always involve a doctor before a teen takes any supplement**, even if it's "natural." This is for a few reasons:

- **Safety and purity:** Supplements are not regulated by the FDA as strictly as medications. Independent tests have found some herbal products don't contain what they claim, or have contaminants. A doctor might recommend reputable brands or check for interactions with any other meds.
- **Possible side effects:** For instance, **kava** is a herb that *can* reduce anxiety, with evidence behind it, but it's *not safe* due to risk of serious liver damage <sup>61</sup>. The FDA has warned about kava <sup>61</sup>. So a well-meaning parent might think "kava is natural, let's try it," but without knowing the risks. That's why professional guidance is key.
- **Age and dosage considerations:** Some supplements haven't been tested in children/teens. Dosing a 14-year-old is not the same as dosing an adult. For example, as mentioned, **lavender oil** taken orally is off-limits for teens <sup>55</sup>, and **St. John's Wort** (an herb for depression) can interfere with many medications and birth control – so definitely medical oversight is needed if someone were to consider it (though St. John's Wort is more for depression than anxiety).
- **Interactions:** Herbs can interact with other medications a teen might be taking (even something as simple as ibuprofen, or birth control pills, etc.). Chamomile, for instance, can increase bleeding risk if someone is on a blood thinner <sup>54</sup> (unlikely for a teen, but an example).

A good general rule from Mayo Clinic: *"Natural doesn't always mean safe."* <sup>62</sup> The **FDA does not strictly monitor supplements**, so quality varies <sup>62</sup>. Therefore, use herbs as **adjuncts** – supportive aids – not primary treatment. They might provide some relief in mild anxiety or help with sleep, but they are *not* a substitute for therapy, lifestyle changes, or (when needed) proper medication.

For many teens, a nice approach is to use **herbal teas** (chamomile, lemon balm, peppermint, etc.) as a comforting ritual rather than jumping into pill supplements. The warmth and routine of evening tea can itself be relaxing. Aromatherapy (like diffusing lavender or using a roller of lavender oil on the wrists) can be enjoyable and safe. Beyond that, any supplement should really be green-lit by a healthcare provider who knows the teen's health history.

From a Christian perspective, one can remember that **God provided many healing elements in nature** (Ezekiel 47:12 speaks of leaves that serve as medicine). Using herbal remedies with wisdom can be seen as part of God's provision. But we're also called to be **wise stewards** of our bodies and not naive – Proverbs 14:15 says *"The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps."* So we shouldn't swallow every "miracle herb" claim on the internet, but thoughtfully consider what has evidence and safety. There is



no magic cure-all herb for anxiety; if there were, anxiety disorders would hardly exist. If a teen is interested in supplements, that conversation can be a chance to discuss how to evaluate health information and to pray for discernment.

In conclusion, some **natural supplements** may offer mild benefit for anxiety (chamomile tea, lavender aromatherapy, magnesium, etc.), but they should be used with caution and **never as the sole approach** for a struggling teen. **Consult healthcare professionals** for guidance. And remember that “last resort” does not mean “failure” – sometimes despite our best use of natural strategies, more intensive medical intervention (like prescription medication) is needed, which we’ll discuss next.

## When Medication Becomes an Option (Last Resort)

We have deliberately emphasized non-pharmaceutical approaches to teen anxiety – spiritual growth, healthy habits, therapy, etc. These are effective for many teens, especially when anxiety is in the mild to moderate range. However, in some cases anxiety can be **severe, chronic, or debilitating** to the point that even after trying therapy and lifestyle changes, the teen is still suffering greatly. This is when **medication** for anxiety might be considered as a *last resort*, under careful medical supervision. There should be no stigma in this: needing medication for a medical condition – which anxiety disorder is – is no more shameful than a diabetic needing insulin or a person with asthma using an inhaler. As Christians, we believe that God can heal through various means, including the advancements of medical science. Luke, the author of one of the gospels, was a physician by trade (Colossians 4:14), and Jesus acknowledged the role of doctors when He said, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick”* (Mark 2:17). So if a teen’s anxiety is truly beyond what they can manage otherwise, **using medication can be a wise and compassionate choice**, not a lack of faith.

The most commonly prescribed medications for adolescent anxiety are **SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)** <sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup>. SSRIs are a class of antidepressants that also work very well for anxiety disorders. Examples include **Fluoxetine (Prozac)**, **Sertraline (Zoloft)**, **Escitalopram (Lexapro)**, among others. These medications help increase serotonin levels in the brain and promote a better balance of the neural circuits involved in anxiety. According to psychiatric guidelines, SSRIs are considered **first-line medication treatment for pediatric anxiety** due to their efficacy and relatively favorable safety profile <sup>65</sup>. For instance, the American Academy of Family Physicians notes that **SSRIs show consistent evidence from randomized trials in improving anxiety symptoms and functioning in children and teens** <sup>66</sup>. Many studies find that about 60–80% of youth have a significant reduction in symptoms with an SSRI <sup>67</sup>. Often, **combining medication with therapy** yields the best outcome <sup>68</sup> – the medication can lower symptom intensity enough that the teen can fully engage in CBT or other strategies, and therapy teaches skills for long-term management so that medication might eventually be tapered off.

If a decision is made to try an SSRI, a **child & adolescent psychiatrist** (or a pediatrician familiar with these meds) should oversee it. They typically start at a very low dose and gradually increase if needed, monitoring for side effects. It’s crucial to have patience: SSRIs usually take **4–6 weeks** (at therapeutic dose) to truly show effects on anxiety. Those weeks can feel long, but abrupt changes aren’t expected in the first days. Parents and teens should be educated on potential side effects: the most common are gastrointestinal upset (nausea, stomachache), changes in appetite or sleep, or headaches – often these are mild and go away in a couple weeks. Some teens experience increased restlessness or agitation in the first two weeks; if severe, the doctor should be notified as a dosage adjustment or switch might be needed. There is also a well-known caution: SSRIs carry an FDA “black box” warning about **possible increased suicidal thoughts** in

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some young people when first starting the medication. While this side effect is *infrequent*, it is something to monitor closely. Parents should keep communication open and seek immediate help if a teen expresses any suicidal ideation. Usually, the benefits of SSRIs in reducing severe anxiety (and thereby reducing despair) outweigh this risk, but vigilance is important.

Another type of medication that might be used in specific scenarios is **beta-blockers** (like propranolol) for performance anxiety – for example, a teen who has crippling panic during public speaking or a big game might, under a doctor's guidance, take a low dose propranolol before the event to blunt the adrenaline response (it slows the heart rate and prevents shaky hands). This isn't an everyday med for anxiety, just situational. **Antihistamines** like hydroxyzine are sometimes prescribed short-term for acute anxiety or to aid sleep; they cause drowsiness which can take the edge off anxiety (hydroxyzine is non-addictive, basically a strong Benadryl-type medicine).

What about **benzodiazepines** (like Xanax, Ativan)? These are generally *avoided* in teens except maybe in very acute crisis or inpatient settings. They do relieve anxiety quickly, but they carry risks: sedation, cognitive impairment, and dependence/addiction potential. For a developing teenage brain, regular benzo use is not advisable unless absolutely necessary. SSRIs, which act more gradually, are preferred for long-term management.

If a teen does go on medication, it should always be **accompanied by therapy and lifestyle strategies**. Medication on its own doesn't teach skills or address underlying issues; it manages symptoms. The ideal scenario is medication provides relief enough that the teen can fully engage in therapy, implement healthy habits, and grow in their faith and coping – and after some time, possibly taper off medication under doctor's guidance. Many teens do not need to stay on meds forever. Some may use it for a year or two during a particularly hard period (e.g., the high school years), then successfully come off. Others with more chronic or biological anxiety might stay on longer, even into adulthood, much like someone with a chronic physical condition uses long-term medication. Either way can be okay – it depends on the individual's situation and in prayerful consultation with healthcare providers and family.

From a Christian perspective, one can view medications as **part of God's provision** in the toolbox of healing. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul advised Timothy to *"use a little wine for the sake of your stomach"* – essentially recommending a remedy for physical ailment. That shows it's not unspiritual to use substances (in that case, medicinal wine) to treat a condition. If Paul were writing today, he might similarly say, *"use a bit of that medicine for your anxiety, so you can function better."* We should pray for healing and also not be afraid to utilize what God has provided through medical knowledge. Taking an SSRI with thankfulness – asking God to let it be effective – and continuing to work on spiritual growth is a holistic way forward. Some Christians worry that medication will numb them or alter their personality. In cases of correctly prescribed SSRIs for an anxiety disorder, the goal is *not* to numb but to restore a level of calm where the person's true personality can shine *without* constant fear. One can still sense God's presence and the motions of the Spirit while on medication (just as one can while on insulin or blood pressure medicine). If anything, reducing severe anxiety might make it easier to engage in prayer and scripture without the constant fog of panic.

It's also important to involve parents and possibly spiritual mentors in the decision. A teen should not secretly start using someone else's anxiety meds or herbal pills out of desperation. Instead, bring the struggle into the light with a doctor and prayer. James 1:5 promises *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God... and it will be given."* Praying for wisdom on treatment decisions is vital. God can guide through the counsel of wise Christian doctors and the inner peace (or lack thereof) one feels about a choice.

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Once on medication, **good stewardship** involves taking it as directed (not skipping doses when feeling better, not abruptly stopping which can cause withdrawal effects, etc.), and keeping follow-up appointments to adjust the plan as needed. It's a team effort between the teen, parents, and doctor. Additionally, combining medication with faith might look like praying before taking the pill, or writing a Bible verse on the pill bottle as a reminder that true peace comes from Christ ultimately (John 14:27) – the medicine is a tool He can use.

In conclusion, **medication is available as a helpful servant but a poor master**. It should never be the first resort for teen anxiety, but in severe cases it can be a life-changing aid. When used, it must be done responsibly under care of a medical professional. The decision to start an SSRI or other med can be difficult, but remember that doing so does not betray a lack of faith – it can be an act of faith, trusting that God can work through doctors and medicine to bring relief. The ultimate goal is the teen's healing and ability to thrive, giving glory to God for the restoration. If medication is part of that journey, it can be embraced with gratitude and careful monitoring. And we always keep in view that our hope is in God, who is the Great Physician, working through various means to accomplish His healing in our lives.

## A Holistic Case Study: From Paralysis to Progress

To illustrate how these approaches can come together, let's look at a **composite case study** of a teenager finding relief from anxiety through a combination of faith, natural strategies, and professional help:

**"Jared,"** age 17, had struggled with **generalized anxiety** for several years. He worried incessantly about academics and the future, to the point that he had frequent tension headaches, difficulty sleeping (often only 4–5 hours a night), and would get nauseated every morning before school. His mind raced with "what ifs" – what if I fail, what if I disappoint my parents, what if something bad happens? When his anxiety peaked, he would also experience panic attacks with a pounding heart and shortness of breath. Initially, Jared kept this mostly to himself, thinking as a Christian he just needed to pray more or be tougher. However, things hit a low point when he started having panic attacks at school; his grades began to slip and he withdrew from activities.

Jared's parents and youth pastor gently intervened after noticing these changes. With their encouragement, Jared began a **multifaceted plan** to address his anxiety:

- **Spiritual Support:** He met with his youth pastor weekly for prayer and mentoring. They discussed scriptures about trust and gave Jared a safe space to voice his fears. The pastor showed Jared examples from the Bible of faithful people who had anxieties, helping him see he wasn't alone or a "bad Christian" for feeling this way. Jared started a practice of reading a psalm before bed and journaling a short prayer, as a way to hand off his worries to God each night. Over time, he reported feeling an "unexplainable peace" on some nights that helped him sleep – a reflection of Philippians 4:6-7 in action.
- **Lifestyle Changes:** Jared worked on his **sleep hygiene** – no more YouTube on his phone past 10 PM, and in fact, he began charging his phone outside his room. He set a regular bedtime of 11 PM and wake time of 7 AM, aiming for 8 hours of sleep. The first week was hard and he was restless, but by week three he was regularly getting about 7.5 hours of sleep. He noticed his morning nausea was greatly reduced when he wasn't utterly exhausted. He also cut out the **two energy drinks** he was having per day to combat fatigue; instead, he drank more water and had just one cup of green tea

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(with L-theanine) in the morning. In terms of **exercise**, Jared wasn't previously active, so he started with small steps: a 20-minute walk with his dog after school. Eventually he worked up to jogging that route. After a month, he realized that on days he exercised, he felt noticeably calmer in the evenings. This motivated him to be consistent, and he achieved the goal of 30–45 minutes of aerobic exercise most days (plus shooting basketball on weekends with friends for fun). His **headaches** all but disappeared, which he attributed to better sleep, hydration, and exercise.

- **Nutrition:** Jared's dietary changes were modest but impactful. He began eating breakfast (previously he felt too anxious to eat in the morning, but that created a blood sugar crash). Even a simple bowl of oatmeal or a banana with peanut butter in the morning gave him more stable energy. He swapped soda for herbal iced tea or water at school. He also took an over-the-counter **magnesium glycinate** supplement in the evenings with his doctor's approval, which may have aided his sleep and muscle relaxation. With these tweaks, his overall tension and jitteriness during the day diminished.
- **Therapy:** Perhaps most crucially, Jared started seeing a **Christian counselor** (a licensed therapist who was also a person of faith) for **CBT**. In therapy, they identified that Jared's core anxiety was fueled by perfectionism and fear of failure. He often thought, *"If I'm not the best, I'm worthless."* The counselor used cognitive techniques to challenge this — was that truly biblical or realistic? They highlighted Jared's worth in God's eyes isn't based on straight A's, and even if he did fail a test, it wouldn't be the end of the world. They practiced **exposures** too: Jared had been avoiding applying to colleges out of fear of rejection. With support, he broke that task into smaller steps (researching one college at a time, writing a rough draft essay, etc.). He applied to five universities. Even though a couple responses were rejections, he found that the anticipation was worse than the reality — he could handle it after all. Meanwhile, therapy taught him **relaxation skills** like deep breathing and grounding. In sessions, they even role-played handling situations that made him anxious (like initiating conversations with classmates or speaking up when he needed help). After about 12 sessions over three months, Jared's **GAD-7 anxiety score** (a standard measure) dropped from a **16 (moderate anxiety)** at intake to a **5 (minimal anxiety)**. Objectively, he was reporting only occasional mild worry, and no longer meeting criteria for an anxiety disorder.
- **Community:** Jared's parents became actively involved in his progress. They attended two family therapy meetings to learn how not to unintentionally fuel his anxiety (for example, they learned not to constantly reassure him or enable his avoidance, but rather encourage him to use his coping skills). They also implemented a weekly family "Sabbath evening" where they'd all relax together (playing a board game or watching a wholesome movie) to bond and de-stress. Jared re-engaged with his youth group at church, even giving a short testimony one night about how God was helping him overcome anxiety. This was a huge milestone – speaking in front of peers would have been impossible for him a few months prior. His transparency ended up inspiring at least two other teens in the group to admit they too struggled and needed help, creating a little support sub-group among them.

After six months, Jared's life looked quite different. He was sleeping 8 hours, maintaining an exercise routine, and practicing daily devotions/prayer which he said *"keeps me centered."* He still had moments of worry (especially around exam time or big life decisions), but he now had tools to deal with it: he'd recognize the spiral and either journal about it or talk it through with someone rather than panicking. If a panic attack started (which was rare now), he would do his breathing exercises and repeat a memorized



verse (2 Timothy 1:7: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear...”*), and he could usually halt it. As a result, he missed zero days of school due to anxiety that semester (versus several the previous year), and his grades actually improved because he could concentrate better without constant fear. Most importantly, **Jared felt joy again**. He told his counselor that he was experiencing what he believed was “the peace of God” guarding his heart as Philippians promised – not a flawless peace, but a notable change. His baseline anxiety went from an 8 out of 10 to maybe a 2 out of 10, and spikes were infrequent. The combination of faith, works (actions), and professional guidance worked together, much like **Nehemiah** rebuilding the wall: praying to God for help *and* holding a sword in one hand to do the work. Jared and his “team” did the work, and God provided the increase of healing.

This case encapsulates how an integrated approach can lead to significant improvement. Every teen’s story will be different – some may require medication if their case is more severe (Jared fortunately did not end up needing meds since other approaches sufficed), and some may have other complicating factors (like learning issues or family conflict to address). But the **principles remain**: address the physical basics (sleep, exercise, nutrition), retrain the mind (therapy and thought renewal), lean into supportive relationships, and continually draw on God’s strength and comfort.

## Conclusion: Moving Forward with Hope and Joy

Anxiety in teens can be incredibly challenging – for the young person and their family – but it is **not insurmountable**. With a comprehensive approach that cares for the *whole person*, teenagers can recover from the grip of anxiety and emerge stronger in character and faith. We’ve seen that **natural remedies** like exercise, proper rest, nutrition, relaxation techniques, and herbs can each play a role in calming the anxious mind. When combined with **professional therapy** and **solid social support**, they create a powerful synergy. Throughout this journey, grounding in **Christian faith** provides an anchor of hope. Biblical truths remind teens that they are loved by God, that they need not face their fears alone, and that there is a purpose beyond the pain.

It’s worth reiterating that overcoming anxiety is usually a **gradual process**. There may be setbacks – a panic episode here, a sleepless night there – but that’s okay. Recovery is rarely linear. The key is to not give up and to celebrate progress, no matter how small. Each step a teen takes (one less avoidance, one more hour of sleep, one prayer said in anxiety instead of spiraling) is a victory. Galatians 6:9 encourages us *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* Persistence with the strategies outlined will yield fruit in time. Parents and mentors should keep reinforcing the teen’s efforts with positive feedback: *“I’m proud of how you faced that fear”, “I see you making healthy choices, that’s fantastic”, “I’m praying for you and I believe you’re going to get through this.”*

For the Christian reader, it’s also crucial to maintain **perspective**: Our ultimate peace comes from Jesus, the “Prince of Peace.” Natural remedies and therapy are means to help us experience that peace, but the source is Him. Encourage the teen to develop their personal relationship with God even as they work on coping skills. Sometimes anxiety can drive a person *toward* God like never before, fostering deeper prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit. God can redeem the experience of anxiety by using it to mature one’s faith, teaching empathy, and preparing them to comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:4 – *“so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God”*). Many great Christian testimonies and even ministries have been birthed out of someone’s journey through anxiety or depression.



Before we close, a gentle note on discernment: In the Christian community, there can be a range of opinions on mental health interventions. Some may say “just pray it away,” others may lean only on medical solutions. But as we’ve discussed, a **both-and approach** is usually most effective. God works through prayer *and* through wise action. Seeking therapy or taking medication is not denying God’s power; it can be an act of stewardship of the mind God gave us. Conversely, neglecting prayer and scripture would ignore the deepest source of healing. **Integrating faith with evidence-based treatment** provides the best of both worlds.

Let’s imagine the future for a teen who applies these principles: They gradually regain a sense of normalcy – laughing more, engaging in school and church, sleeping well, looking forward to life. They still have some worries (everyone does), but those worries no longer paralyze them. They’ve learned to cast cares on God and use their coping tools. In fact, the struggle equips them with a **testimony of God’s faithfulness** and perhaps a calling to help others facing similar issues. They can echo the words of Psalm 34:4, *“I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.”* The Lord’s deliverance might have come through a counselor’s guidance, a parent’s hug, a jog in the park, a good night’s sleep, a timely verse – likely *all of the above* – but it’s ultimately His hand in all those things.

For any teen or parent reading this, know that **you are not alone and there is help**. Anxiety may roar like a lion, but remember that through Christ, you have the tools to prevail – *“the righteous are as bold as a lion”* (Proverbs 28:1) in the face of fear. Keep taking those small steps each day. Surround yourself with supportive people. Spend time with God daily, even if it’s just “God, I’m anxious, please help me” (a prayer He never tires of hearing). And utilize these natural strategies – they really do work, especially when done consistently. Over time, anxiety can shift from a master over your life to merely a whisper you occasionally hear and address.

**Joy and peace are possible again.** Jesus promised, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:27). This peace of Christ is not a one-time switch but a fruit cultivated (Galatians 5:22) – through prayer, through practicing trust, through caring for the body and mind He gave you. As you or your teen faithfully pursue these remedies and lean on the Lord, that fruit will grow.

In closing, may the God of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way (2 Thessalonians 3:16). Take heart – **anxiety can be overcome**. With the right help and God’s grace, a teenager can step out of the shadow of fear and into a life of hope, purpose, and yes, *joy* in Christ.

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