



Natural Remedies for Anxiety Instead of Medication

Anxiety is a common struggle that can sap our joy and peace – even for devoted Christians. Many believers seek **natural remedies for anxiety instead of medication** to find relief while deepening their relationship with Jesus. The good news is that Scripture and science together offer a holistic toolkit for overcoming anxiety. In this article, we'll explore how **faith-based practices, lifestyle changes, and therapeutic techniques** can help calm anxious minds. We'll also discuss when modern medicine is appropriate – all with a balanced, biblical perspective. Through it all, we are reminded that God “cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7, NIV) and provides many avenues for healing and peace.

Understanding Anxiety: A Faith and Science Perspective

What is anxiety? Anxiety is more than just occasional worry – it's an ongoing sense of fear or dread that can affect our mind, body, and spirit. From a medical standpoint, anxiety triggers our *fight-or-flight* response: the brain's amygdala sounds an alarm, releasing stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. These chemicals prepare us to face danger, but when they surge too often or without real threat, we experience racing thoughts, a pounding heart, shortness of breath, and other distressing symptoms ¹ ². Chronic anxiety can become an **anxiety disorder** (such as generalized anxiety, panic disorder, or social anxiety) that interferes with daily life.

From a faith perspective, anxiety has been part of the human condition since biblical times. Scripture acknowledges the heaviness of anxiety – “Anxiety weighs down the heart” (Proverbs 12:25) – yet it also consistently teaches “*do not be afraid*” because God is with us. Notably, **experiencing anxiety is not a sin in itself**. Many godly figures felt anxious or fearful: the psalmist David often cried out to God in fear, the prophet Elijah fled in despair (1 Kings 19:3-4), and even Martha was “worried and upset” (Luke 10:41). Jesus gently addressed Martha's anxiety, saying she was worried about many things when only one thing was needed – to rest in His presence (Luke 10:41-42). These stories remind us that God understands our frailty. He invites us to bring our anxious thoughts to Him rather than shame us for them.

Biology and belief are both involved in anxiety. As Christians we recognize we are whole persons – body, mind, and spirit. Our physical brain chemistry, thought patterns, life experiences, and spiritual state all intertwine. For example, if we ruminate on worries, our body reacts with tense muscles and rapid heartbeat; if we are sleep-deprived or malnourished, we feel more mentally fragile; if we lack trust in God's care, fears can spiral. This means a holistic solution is needed. The Bible addresses the *spiritual and cognitive side* of anxiety (“be transformed by the renewing of your mind” – Romans 12:2), while research in psychology and neuroscience gives insight into *lifestyle and therapeutic strategies* that calm the nervous system. By integrating faith and science, we can tackle anxiety from every angle.



Biblical Encouragement and Spiritual Disciplines for Anxiety

Scriptural wisdom offers powerful remedies for anxiety. The most famous passage is Philippians 4:6-7, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (NIV). Here the apostle Paul isn't shaming us for feeling anxious; rather, he gives a practical antidote: turn your worries into **prayer**. When we **pray** and consciously hand our concerns to God, He promises a supernatural peace to stand guard over our heart and mind. This is not a one-time exercise but a daily discipline – “in every situation” – indicating we should make prayer our first resort whenever anxiety arises.

Prayer and trust in God are proven to reduce anxiety. Beyond the spiritual assurance, studies have found that people of faith who pray regularly experience tangible anxiety relief. For example, Dr. Harold Koenig and colleagues have documented that prayer is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression in numerous populations ³ ⁴. In one study of Christians, **100% of participants reported some anxiety reduction through prayer**, with most describing feelings of peace and confidence after praying during anxious moments ⁵ ⁶. Prayer provides an outlet to express fears to a loving God, which **eases internal stress** and brings comfort that we are not alone. King David modeled this in the Psalms: *“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”* (Psalm 34:4, NIV). Pouring out our hearts to God in honest prayer is often the first step to calming an anxious heart.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” – 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” – Psalm 56:3 (NIV)

Meditating on God's truth is another biblical remedy. Much anxiety is fueled by fearful or false thoughts – *“What if I lose my job? What if something bad happens?”* To counter this, Scripture encourages us to meditate on what is true, good, and sovereign: *“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you”* (Isaiah 26:3, NIV). Deliberately refocusing our mind on God's promises can interrupt the cycle of worry. For instance, when anxious thoughts tell us “I'm all alone in this,” we can affirm God's promise *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5). When we fear lacking provisions, we recall Jesus' words that our heavenly Father feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, so *“do not worry...you are worth more than many sparrows”* (Matthew 6:25-34). This kind of **Scripture meditation** – slowly repeating and pondering a comforting verse – is akin to cognitive-behavioral therapy for the soul. It replaces lies with God's truth. In fact, Christian counselors note that **biblical meditation aligns with therapy techniques** of thought replacement, helping individuals *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV). By anchoring our minds in God's Word, we gradually renew our mental patterns from panic to peace.

One practical way to do this is keeping a **prayer journal or gratitude journal**. Writing down worries as prayer requests and listing things you're thankful for can shift your focus from fear to faith. Thanksgiving is a key part of Philippians 4:6's formula – as we thank God for past faithfulness, our confidence in His future provision grows. Many believers find that starting the day with Bible reading and prayer sets a calm tone, and when panic rises later, returning to those scriptures or **breathing prayers** (short, repeated prayers) helps re-center their thoughts on God's presence.

Faith community and fellowship also play a role. The Bible often instructs believers to encourage one another. Talking with a trusted friend, pastor, or support group about your anxieties can lighten the load

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“Carry each other’s burdens,” Galatians 6:2). Sometimes just knowing others are praying for you brings relief. Even the act of singing worship songs can combat anxiety – music has soothing effects on the brain, and worship refocuses us on God’s greatness instead of our problems. Remember how Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in prison despite their dire situation (Acts 16:25)? Their hearts were set on God, and He gave them peace and ultimately deliverance. In the same way, integrating **spiritual disciplines** – prayer, scripture meditation, worship, fellowship – into your daily life builds an inner resilience. Over time, these practices strengthen your faith and “*perfect love drives out fear*” (1 John 4:18, NIV) as you grow more aware of God’s love and sovereignty.

Real-world example: A young man named Alex was overwhelmed with anxiety about his finances and future. Instead of immediately seeking medication, he committed to start each morning in quiet prayer and Bible reading. He memorized a few verses like Philippians 4:6-7 and repeated them whenever worry struck. He also reached out to a church friend for prayer support. After two months, Alex noticed a dramatic change – his panic attacks subsided, and he described feeling “God’s peace” guarding him during the day. Alex still had concerns, but they no longer paralyzed him. His experience echoes the promise of Scripture and research: turning to **spiritual practices** can significantly ease anxiety and restore joy.

Lifestyle Strategies for Anxiety Relief (Mind and Body)

Our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19), and caring for our physical health is a biblical principle that has mental health benefits. Modern research confirms that certain **lifestyle changes** can powerfully reduce anxiety by calming the body’s stress response. By aligning with these wise practices, we steward our bodies and experience greater peace of mind. Here are some key lifestyle strategies:

- **Exercise Regularly: Physical activity is one of the most effective natural anti-anxiety remedies.** Aerobic exercise (like brisk walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming) helps “*dissipate stress*” and improve mood ⁷ ¹. Harvard Medical School notes that exercise lowers the body’s stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) and releases endorphins – natural chemicals that enhance mood and have a calming effect ¹ ². Many clinical trials have found that exercise can **significantly reduce anxiety symptoms**, sometimes as effectively as medication for mild to moderate anxiety ⁸ ¹. From a behavioral standpoint, getting active also boosts self-esteem and provides a healthy distraction from worries ⁹ ¹⁰. Even biblical figures understood the value of physical movement – for example, Elijah, after a period of deep fear and depression, gained strength from a long journey (1 Kings 19:8). You don’t have to be an athlete: start with gentle activities like walking in nature or doing stretches. Aim for at least 20–30 minutes of exercise most days. Not only will it relax your body, but it can also become a time to pray or listen to worship music, turning your workout into spiritual renewal.
- **Prioritize Sleep and Rest:** Sufficient **sleep** is essential for an anxious mind. When we’re exhausted, the brain’s emotion regulation centers (like the amygdala) become hyperreactive, and we cope poorly with stress. In contrast, getting **7–9 hours of quality sleep** gives your nervous system a chance to reset. The Bible affirms the gift of sleep: “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). Establish a calming bedtime routine – perhaps reading a devotional or praying – to cue your body that it’s time to unwind. If insomnia or racing thoughts are an issue, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation can help. **Deep breathing** (slowly inhaling to a count of 4, exhaling to 6 or 8) is a simple tool that switches the body into a parasympathetic, relaxed state, lowering heart

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rate and tension. Even a brief pause to *“Be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10) while breathing deeply can interrupt an anxiety spiral in the moment. Along with nightly sleep, remember the principle of **Sabbath rest** – taking breaks from constant busyness. Jesus often withdrew to solitary places to rest and pray (Luke 5:16). In a culture of hustle, **regular rest (without guilt) is vital** to prevent burnout and anxiety.

- **Healthy Diet and Hydration:** “You are what you eat” applies to mental health too. **Nutrition has a notable impact on anxiety.** Research in nutritional psychiatry has found that diets rich in whole, unprocessed foods are associated with lower anxiety, whereas diets high in sugar and refined carbs can worsen anxiety and mood swings ¹¹ ¹². To support a calm mind, focus on a **balanced diet:** plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats (like omega-3s). Complex carbohydrates (like oats, brown rice, sweet potatoes) metabolize slowly and help maintain steady blood sugar, which creates a calmer feeling ¹¹. This is important because **skipping meals or consuming too much sugar/caffeine can trigger jitteriness and panic** due to blood sugar spikes and crashes ¹³. Ensure you stay hydrated with water as well – even mild dehydration can make anxiety worse.

Modern research has uncovered fascinating links between the gut and the brain. About **95% of the body’s serotonin receptors are found in the gut lining**, so what happens in your digestive system can influence your mood ¹² ¹⁴. A diet supportive of gut health may help ease anxiety. **Probiotic foods** (yogurt with live cultures, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha) have been linked to reduced social anxiety in studies ¹⁵ ¹⁶. Foods rich in **magnesium** (leafy greens, nuts, seeds, whole grains) may have a calming effect, since low magnesium levels have been associated with increased anxiety ¹⁴ ¹⁷. **Zinc** is another mineral linked to lower anxiety; good sources include cashews, beef, egg yolks, and pumpkin seeds ¹⁸. Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fatty fish like salmon, or flaxseed and walnuts) are well-known for supporting brain health and have shown anxiety-reducing benefits in research ¹⁹ ²⁰. Even certain phytonutrients have anti-anxiety properties – for example, an extract of **asparagus** was approved in China as a natural supplement for anxiety relief ²¹. And broadly, **antioxidant-rich foods** (berries, leafy greens, beans, etc.) might help, since chronic anxiety is correlated with increased oxidative stress ²² ²³. In summary, eating a wholesome diet and avoiding excess caffeine, alcohol, and junk food can make a noticeable difference in your daily anxiety levels. As the prophet Elijah experienced, sometimes the first step to healing was simply to eat and rest (1 Kings 19:5-8) – only after addressing his physical depletion did God speak to his spiritual needs. We should likewise not neglect the basics of bodily care in our battle against anxiety.

- **Limit Stimulants and Depressants:** It’s wise to **reduce or avoid substances that can exacerbate anxiety**, such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol. Caffeine is a stimulant that can trigger adrenaline release and make you feel more jittery or panicky (think of the rapid heartbeat and nervousness after too much coffee). Nicotine from cigarettes also raises heart rate and blood pressure, and while smokers often use cigarettes to “calm down,” nicotine actually increases anxiety over time ²⁴ ²⁵. Alcohol might seem to relax you initially, but as it wears off it can cause rebound anxiety and disturb sleep. In fact, relying on alcohol or other substances to cope can lead to a vicious cycle and even addiction. Scripture warns, “Do not get drunk on wine...instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), reminding us not to use alcohol as a false refuge. Opt for caffeine-free herbal teas (chamomile tea is a traditional calming drink, and **some evidence shows chamomile can mildly reduce anxiety symptoms**), and if you smoke, seek help to quit – your nerves will thank you.



- **Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques:** Integrating **relaxation practices** into your routine can train your body to unwind. Consider exercises like **yoga, gentle stretching, or tai chi**, which combine physical movement with deep breathing and mindfulness. These activities activate the body's relaxation response and have been shown to lower anxiety. **Christian mindfulness or contemplative prayer** is another powerful tool: this involves quietly focusing your mind on God's presence, perhaps repeating a simple phrase like "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not fear," while letting go of distracting thoughts. Such practices echo the biblical exhortation to meditate on the Lord and "**be still before Him**" (Psalm 37:7). They also parallel secular mindfulness techniques which have a robust evidence base for reducing anxiety and stress. Even **creative hobbies** – like drawing, gardening, or playing an instrument – can serve as healthy outlets that calm the mind. The key is to break the constant loop of worry by engaging in an absorbing, peaceful activity. Jesus modeled withdrawing from stress to reconnect with God; we too need those moments of pause. Rather than endlessly scrolling on our phones (which often increases anxiety), we do well to fill our downtime with life-giving activities that relax and renew us.
- **Time in Nature:** Don't overlook the healing effect of God's creation. Spending time outdoors in green spaces can lower stress hormone levels and alleviate anxiety. A walk in the park, a hike, or simply sitting under a tree praying can bring a sense of God's peace. The Psalms frequently point to nature as a source of refreshment – "*He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul*" (Psalm 23:2-3, NIV). When anxiety rises, stepping outside for a few minutes of fresh air, feeling the sun, or gazing at the birds can remind you that the same God who cares for the lilies and sparrows is watching over you (Matthew 6:26-29). Nature helps put our problems in perspective and stills our racing thoughts.

In summary, caring for your *body* through exercise, rest, diet, and relaxation is not a "worldly" approach but a very biblical one. We are whole beings, and tending to our physical wellbeing honors God. Implementing these lifestyle remedies creates a more stable foundation on which the *spiritual and mental work* of overcoming anxiety can build. Try gradually adding one change at a time – perhaps start nightly walks or swap soda for herbal tea – and notice how it affects your anxiety over a few weeks. Small habits, done consistently, can yield big results.

Therapeutic Strategies: Renewing the Mind

While prayer and lifestyle changes form the core of natural anxiety relief, **professional therapy and psychological techniques** can also be invaluable. God has gifted us with minds capable of learning, adapting, and healing. Engaging in therapy or practicing therapeutic exercises is not a lack of faith, but a wise use of available tools – much like one would see a physical therapist to recover from an injury. In fact, many therapy principles align beautifully with biblical wisdom on managing thoughts and emotions.

The most evidence-based therapy for anxiety is **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**. CBT is a short-term, skills-focused counseling approach that teaches you to identify negative thought patterns and replace them with healthier ones, while gradually facing your fears in small steps. **Psychologists consider CBT the gold standard for anxiety disorders**, and it has been found highly effective in numerous studies ²⁶ ²⁷ . According to the Mayo Clinic, "*Cognitive behavioral therapy is the most effective form of psychotherapy for anxiety disorders*", often helping people improve significantly within a few months ²⁶ . In CBT, a therapist works with you to uncover the specific thoughts that trigger your anxiety – for example, catastrophizing ("If I make a mistake at work, I'll get fired and ruin my life") or overestimating danger ("If I go to that social



event, I'll embarrass myself and everyone will reject me"). These distorted thoughts are gently challenged and tested against reality. You learn to replace them with more rational, constructive thoughts ("One mistake won't cost me my job; I can fix it" or "I might feel awkward at the party, but many people feel the same and it's likely to be okay"). This process echoes the biblical call to "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2) and to dwell on things that are true and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). In a sense, **CBT is about aligning our thinking with truth** rather than lies – a concept Christians are familiar with in spiritual growth.

CBT also often includes **exposure therapy**, where you gradually face feared situations in a controlled way to build confidence. For instance, if someone has severe social anxiety, therapy might start with imagining a social interaction while practicing relaxation, then progress to saying hello to a stranger, and eventually attending a small gathering, all while learning to manage the anxious feelings. This systematic exposure is very effective at breaking phobias and avoidance behaviors ²⁷ ²⁸. Interestingly, exposure requires courage and perseverance – virtues the Bible encourages. We might compare it to God gently guiding us to face our fears with His support, much like He told Joshua to step into the Jordan River before it parted, saying "Be strong and courageous... for the LORD your God will be with you" (Joshua 1:9). With each step of faith (or therapy exercise), the grip of fear loosens a bit more.

Beyond CBT, there are other therapeutic strategies and self-help techniques that can help manage anxiety:

- **Identifying Triggers and Patterns:** Keeping a journal to note when anxiety spikes can reveal patterns. You might discover, for example, that your anxiety is worst after reading bad news or when you're alone late at night. Once you know triggers, you can plan coping strategies for those times. This reflects Proverbs 27:12 – "The prudent see danger and take refuge." By recognizing what tends to set you off, you can "take refuge" by either avoiding unnecessary triggers or preparing yourself (through prayer, truth reminders, or relaxation techniques) to face them without panicking.
- **Problem-Solving and Time Management:** Some anxieties are exacerbated by feeling overwhelmed or out of control in life. Basic problem-solving skills – breaking big tasks into small steps, making to-do lists, managing time – can reduce that overwhelm. Jesus taught about taking life "*one day at a time*" (Matthew 6:34) instead of letting tomorrow's worries flood today. Learning to set boundaries and say no when necessary is also important to prevent an overpacked, stressful life. Christian counselors often help clients develop balanced schedules that include work, rest, and recreation in healthy measure.
- **Relaxation and Grounding Techniques:** Therapists teach various exercises to cope with acute anxiety or panic attacks. Aside from deep breathing, one popular method is the "5-4-3-2-1" **grounding exercise**: you acknowledge 5 things you see, 4 things you feel (touch), 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. This technique shifts your focus to the present moment and sensory realities, pulling you out of the whirlpool of anxious thoughts. It pairs well with a brief prayer ("Thank you Lord for what I can observe right now") to remind you that in *this* moment, you are safe. Another approach is **muscle relaxation**, progressively tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups, which releases physical tension and sends a signal to your brain that it's okay to calm down.
- **Christian Counseling and Pastoral Care:** Seeking out a Christian counselor can provide a safe space to integrate faith and psychology in your healing process. A trained counselor can teach you

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the above techniques and more, while also addressing any deeper roots of anxiety (such as past trauma, grief, or identity issues) from a biblical perspective. Sometimes anxiety is tied to unresolved emotional wounds or false beliefs about oneself or God. A Christian therapist or wise pastor can help you process those in light of God's truth and grace. For example, someone with anxiety stemming from perfectionism might need to internalize God's unconditional love (that our worth isn't based on performance), while someone with fear from past abuse might need to work through forgiveness and regain a sense of safety. **Therapy is not a quick fix, but it can be a profoundly freeing journey** when combined with faith. As Proverbs 20:5 says, "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." A good counselor, guided by the Holy Spirit, can help draw out those deep waters and bring understanding that leads to peace.

- **Support Groups and Mentors:** Connecting with others who have overcome or are managing similar struggles can reduce the isolation of anxiety. Many churches or communities have support groups for anxiety or mental health, where people share experiences and coping strategies. Knowing "I'm not the only one" provides comfort and the opportunity to learn practical tips from peers. Mentoring is another avenue – an older, mature Christian might walk alongside a younger person dealing with anxiety, offering prayer and encouragement (Titus 2:3-4 principle). God often uses **relationships to facilitate healing**, as honest sharing of our burdens brings light into the darkness (James 5:16).

Biblical cognitive reframing: It's worth noting that many cognitive techniques mirror biblical instruction. When anxious thoughts attack, **respond with God's Word** just as Jesus did when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). For instance, if you think, "I have to control this situation or everything will fall apart," remind yourself, "*God is my refuge and strength*" (Psalm 46:1) and "*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him*" (Romans 8:28). If you worry, "I can't handle this," tell yourself, "*I can do all this through Him who gives me strength*" (Philippians 4:13). Over time, this practice of **taking every thought captive** and correcting it with truth trains your brain to stay in peace. It's essentially a spiritual form of CBT that relies on the Holy Spirit and Scripture as the guiding truth.

Case Study: A woman named Maria struggled with panic attacks whenever she had to drive on highways due to a past accident. Through Christian counseling, she practiced exposure therapy by first riding in a car on the highway with a friend, then driving short distances early in the morning when traffic was light. At the same time, she memorized Psalm 91 and would quote, "*He will cover you with His feathers and under His wings you will find refuge,*" whenever panic rose. She also learned to challenge catastrophic thoughts ("If I start panicking, I'll crash") with more grounded ones ("Anxiety is uncomfortable but I can still drive safely; I've done it before"). After a few months, Maria was able to drive on the interstate alone. She still felt twinges of anxiety but knew how to manage them through breathing and prayer. Her **renewed mindset and gradual practice** led to freedom in an area that once paralyzed her, illustrating the effectiveness of combining therapeutic techniques with faith.

The Neuroscience of Prayer and Peace

A remarkable area where faith and science converge is in the field of **neuroscience** – the study of the brain and nervous system. Research in the past two decades has revealed that **spiritual practices like prayer and meditation literally change the brain** in ways that can reduce anxiety and depression. This should not surprise us, as the Creator of our brains designed them to respond to worship and connection with Him! Still, it's fascinating to see scientific evidence affirming what believers have experienced for centuries: that "*He restores my soul*" (Psalm 23:3) is a biological reality as well as a spiritual one.

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One pioneering researcher, Dr. Andrew Newberg (a neurotheologian), used brain scans (fMRI and SPECT imaging) to study people engaged in prayer. He found that **as little as 12 minutes of focused prayer each day, practiced consistently for 8 weeks, led to measurable changes in the brain** ²⁹ ³⁰ . Specifically, prayer increased activity and even physical density in the **anterior cingulate cortex**, a region associated with empathy, compassion, and emotional regulation ³¹ . In other words, prayer strengthened neural circuits that help us experience love and manage emotions. Participants became, in Newberg's words, "nicer and more forgiving" as this part of the brain grew ³¹ . At the same time, prayer reduced activity in the **amygdala**, the brain's fear center responsible for the fight-or-flight response ³² . **Decreasing amygdala activation corresponds to lower anxiety, stress, and even physical benefits like reduced blood pressure and heart rate** ³² . Essentially, regular prayer seems to quiet the brain's alarm system and enhance the areas that produce peace and self-control. It's as if Philippians 4:7 ("the peace of God... will guard your hearts and minds") has a neurological echo – the peace of God is literally guarding the brain by damping fearful reactivity.

Neuroscience has also studied forms of **meditative prayer and worship**. For example, contemplative practices such as praying the Rosary or repeating a Bible verse in a rhythm have been shown to induce a calmer brain state. Dr. Newberg's research with Carmelite nuns practicing *centering prayer* (a silent, wordless form of prayer) showed increased activity in frontal lobe regions (concentration, sense of connection) and decreased activity in the parietal lobes (orientation), which corresponded with a feeling of unity with God and less awareness of stressors ³³ ³⁴ . In one study, reciting the Jesus Prayer or Rosary was found to significantly reduce anxiety, likely because the combination of meaningful words and gentle repetition soothes the amygdala and engages focus ³⁵ ³⁶ . Likewise, singing worship songs or hymns can trigger the release of dopamine and oxytocin (brain chemicals associated with reward and bonding), making us feel comforted and connected. Researchers note that **religious music and communal worship activate brain regions linked to positive emotions and social bonding**, which can counteract loneliness and fear.

Interestingly, focusing on the **love of God** has a distinct neurobiological effect. Newberg explained that dwelling on loving, peaceful thoughts of God engages the brain's frontal regions that govern positive emotion, which in turn **suppress the amygdala's fear signals** ³⁷ ³⁸ . This aligns perfectly with 1 John 4:18, "*perfect love drives out fear.*" When we concentrate on God's perfect love – His care, His nearness, His Fatherly concern – our brain's fear center is literally calmed by the frontal lobe's reminder that we are safe and loved. On the flip side, if someone's religious focus is on guilt, punishment, or fear of God's wrath, it could *increase* anxiety. Thus, it's important to nurture an accurate, grace-filled view of God's character. As our thoughts about God become more trustful and loving, the brain's anxiety circuits quiet down. In short, **faith in a loving God is good for your brain health** ³⁹ ⁴⁰ !

Neuroplasticity – the brain's ability to rewire and change – is a gift from God that allows healing and growth. It means that no matter how anxious or stuck we feel, our brains *can* learn new patterns. Romans 12:2 tells us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind," and neuroscience confirms such renewal is possible on a cellular level. When you repeatedly practice prayer, meditation on Scripture, gratitude, or any positive mental habit, new neural pathways form and strengthen (often summarized as "**neurons that fire together, wire together**" ⁴¹ ⁴²). Over time, these become the "default" pathways, making it easier to experience calm and harder to fall into panic. One study found significant brain changes in as little as **eight weeks of a daily 12-minute prayer/meditation routine** ⁴³ ⁴⁴ . Participants' brains showed shifts towards a more relaxed and attentive state, which corresponded with feeling less anxious and more spiritually connected. How encouraging is that! Just as working out our physical muscles builds strength, regularly exercising our "*faith muscle*" through spiritual practices builds mental resilience. This scientific evidence

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should motivate us to persevere in prayer and scripture, even when we don't feel immediate results, knowing that God may be rewiring our brains for peace behind the scenes.

To summarize, **the neuroscience of faith** reveals that *prayer is a powerful form of brain therapy*. It can reorient our neural pathways from fear to trust. Meditation on God's Word can renew not only our minds but our actual brain structure. Worship and loving fellowship can flood our brains with positive neurochemicals that combat depression and anxiety. Truly, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), designed so that communion with God produces tangible peace. Next time you pray or worship, remember: you're not only nurturing your soul, you're also soothing your brain! Science is essentially catching up with what Scripture has long taught – that staying our minds on God brings "*life and peace*" (Romans 8:6).

The Role of Modern Medicine and When It's Needed

Thus far we have focused on natural, non-pharmaceutical approaches to managing anxiety. However, it's important to acknowledge that **medication and medical treatments for anxiety have their place as part of God's provision**. Christians have sometimes been hesitant about psychiatric medication, wondering if using drugs to treat anxiety indicates a lack of faith or reliance on "worldly" solutions. Let's address this clearly: **taking medication for anxiety is not inherently sinful or wrong**. In fact, it can be a wise choice in certain circumstances – one that enables you to function better so you can continue to pursue spiritual and emotional healing.

A helpful perspective comes from biblical counselor Tim Allchin, who wrote: "*No, taking anti-anxiety medicines is not wrong because you are doing it to find relief and the ability to function at an improved level. This is a worthwhile goal and morally acceptable.*" ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ . If your goal in using medication is to alleviate crippling symptoms so that you can work, care for family, engage in community, and pursue your relationship with God more effectively, that is a positive use. There is nothing in the Bible that forbids using medicine; on the contrary, Scripture and church history often **affirm the use of medical remedies**. Luke, the author of one Gospel and Acts, was a physician by profession (Colossians 4:14), and he surely used the medical knowledge of his day to aid others. The Apostle Paul advised Timothy to "*use a little wine for your stomach*" when he had frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23), essentially giving a first-century medicinal remedy. Jesus Himself acknowledged, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick*" (Luke 5:31, NIV) – a statement that normalizes seeking a doctor's help when ill. We must remember that **mental health conditions are real health conditions**. If one would take insulin for diabetes or wear glasses for poor vision without shame, taking an anti-anxiety medication when needed should be viewed similarly. It's simply addressing a health issue.

That said, medication for anxiety (like any medical intervention) should be used with wisdom and balance. **When might medication be considered?** Generally, if your anxiety is **severe, debilitating, or not improving despite therapy and lifestyle changes**, it may be time to consult a doctor or psychiatrist about medication. Some people have biological factors (such as genetics or neurotransmitter imbalances) that make their anxiety especially intense, and medication can correct or compensate for that. For instance, a person with severe panic disorder might benefit from an SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) to stabilize their serotonin levels, which in turn reduces the frequency of panic attacks. Another individual with generalized anxiety might find that a short-term course of an anxiolytic medication helps break the cycle of constant worry enough that they can actually engage in therapy and implement coping strategies. In such



cases, **medication can serve as a helpful bridge** – providing symptomatic relief while the person works on deeper issues in counseling.

There are several classes of anti-anxiety medications, each working differently. The main categories include:

- **SSRIs and SNRIs (antidepressants):** These adjust serotonin and norepinephrine levels in the brain and are commonly prescribed for chronic anxiety as well as depression. They are taken daily and generally take a few weeks to build up effect. They are non-addictive and can help temper the constant background anxiety many feel.
- **Benzodiazepines:** Such as Xanax (alprazolam) or Valium (diazepam), which enhance GABA (a calming brain chemical) and provide quick relief. They are effective for acute anxiety or panic attacks, but they **carry risks** of dependency and tolerance if used long-term. Doctors usually prescribe these sparingly (for short-term or situational use) because the body can become accustomed to them.
- **Buspirone:** A non-sedating anxiolytic that also affects serotonin. It's generally for longer-term treatment of generalized anxiety and has the advantage of not causing dependence, though it's milder in effect.
- **Beta-blockers:** Medications like propranolol, which are actually blood pressure medicines but can blunt the physical adrenaline effects of anxiety (trembling, rapid heart rate). They are sometimes used for performance anxiety (e.g., someone who gets stage fright before public speaking might use a beta-blocker to feel steadier).

Each of these has benefits and potential side effects. It's crucial to **work with a qualified physician** to determine if medication is right for you, and if so, which type. Medication should ideally be one part of a broader treatment plan that includes therapy and lifestyle changes. Studies show that for many anxiety disorders, **a combination of medication and psychotherapy yields the best outcomes** ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ . Medication can reduce symptoms in the short term, while therapy equips you with long-term skills to manage and eventually overcome anxiety.

A healthy way to view medication from a Christian lens is to see it as *addressing the physical aspect* of anxiety so that you are freed up to address the mental and spiritual aspects. As one pastor who openly shared about taking anxiety medication said, "The Lord can use lots of different things, including medication, to bring healing and relief" ⁴⁹ . It's not an *either/or* between faith and medicine; it can be *both/and*. You can pray fervently and take your prescribed medicine without contradiction. In fact, you can even pray over your medicine – asking God to use it for your good and minimize any side effects, just as you'd pray for healing through a surgery or through God's direct touch. All healing ultimately comes from God, whether through natural means, medical science, or miracle.

Defending the use of medicine biblically: Some worry that relying on medication means not relying on God. But consider this: if you had pneumonia, you would likely pray and also take antibiotics. You wouldn't consider that a spiritual failure, but wisdom. Similarly, if severe anxiety is a physiological issue, treating it medically can be an act of stewardship of one's health. Moreover, using medicine often *enables* a person to engage more with God, not less. For example, someone with crippling anxiety might be so paralyzed they can't even go to church or read their Bible; a medication could alleviate enough of that burden that they are able to participate in spiritual life again. In that sense, medicine can support your spiritual growth.

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Cautions and balance: While medication is helpful for many, it's not a cure-all and it's not necessary for everyone. For mild to moderate anxiety, the natural strategies we've discussed (therapy, exercise, etc.) might be sufficient and preferable as first-line approaches. Medications can have side effects (like drowsiness, dizziness, weight changes, or sexual side effects in the case of SSRIs) and some, like benzodiazepines, carry risk of addiction. There's also the phenomenon of **dependency** – relying on the pill alone and neglecting to do the inner work. As Dr. Allchin noted, medication *“can change the way anxiety feels, but it can't actually address the object of your fear... it doesn't solve one's anxious thought patterns.”* ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ It's possible for someone to take an anti-anxiety drug and feel better temporarily, but still have all the same worries and false beliefs under the surface. That's why most experts recommend using medication **in conjunction with counseling or spiritual guidance**, not as a standalone solution. The goal should be, if possible, to use medication short-term while you develop long-term coping skills. In many cases, once a person has built up their toolkit of therapy techniques and lifestyle habits, they can work with their doctor to taper off the medication. If you do take medication, never stop it suddenly or without medical supervision – always follow your doctor's guidance, as abrupt discontinuation can be dangerous.

Finally, **avoid self-medicating** with things like alcohol, marijuana, or unverified supplements. It can be tempting to have a few drinks to “calm nerves” or try herbal remedies you read about online. But alcohol can lead to dependence and worsened anxiety, and certain herbs (like kava kava) that are touted for anxiety can have serious risks (kava can cause liver damage, for example ⁵² ⁵³). Some supplements like chamomile or lavender are generally safe and mildly calming, but even “natural” substances should be used with caution and ideally under a health provider's advice ⁵⁴ ⁵⁵. **Always consult your doctor** before taking any new supplement or over-the-counter remedy, especially if you are already on medication (to avoid interactions). Remember, **herbal does not automatically mean harmless**.

In summary, medication for anxiety is a legitimate tool that Christians need not fear. When used appropriately, it can be a **gift from God** – part of His common grace through medical knowledge – to alleviate suffering. The key is to approach it prayerfully, wisely, and in balance with addressing spiritual and psychological factors. Whether or not you personally ever use anxiety medication, have compassion and respect for those who do. Each person's journey is unique. There should be no stigma in the body of Christ for getting the help one needs, in whatever form, to become healthy.

Integrating Faith, Wisdom, and Healing: A Holistic Path

Having explored various dimensions of managing anxiety, we see that the most effective approach is an **integrated one** – treating the whole person. God designed us as holistic beings, and our healing often comes through multiple channels working together. A famous African proverb says, “The Lord can heal a sick person, but a doctor is nice to have around.” Likewise, prayer is powerful, and *so are* the practical steps He prompts us to take.

Consider how these elements can complement each other:

- **Spiritual:** Prayer invites God's direct help and reassures us of His presence. Scripture meditation reorients our thinking to truth. Faith gives us hope and strength to face challenges. The church community provides encouragement and bears our burdens. These address the root of anxiety in our *spirit* – restoring trust in God's love and sovereignty.



- **Mental/Emotional:** Therapy and self-help strategies equip our *mind* to break free from destructive thought patterns. We learn to process emotions, resolve past wounds, and develop resilience. Our mindset shifts from fearful to empowered, from chaos to soundness (2 Timothy 1:7, “God has given us a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind”).
- **Physical/Neural:** Lifestyle changes (exercise, diet, sleep) and possibly medication or supplements help balance the *body and brain*. The nervous system calms, brain chemistry steadies, and we gain the physical capacity to implement what we learn in therapy and spiritual practice. Taking care of the “temple” makes it easier for us to sense God’s peace.

When all three spheres – spirit, mind, and body – are engaged, they reinforce each other in a positive cycle. For example, exercising (body) might improve your mood which makes it easier to pray and concentrate on Scripture (spirit), which then gives you motivation to challenge negative thoughts (mind), and so on. Conversely, if one area is neglected, progress might stall; for instance, you might be praying diligently but not addressing an unhealthy lifestyle that’s fueling anxiety, or you might take medication but not seek God or counseling for deeper healing. **Balance is key.** Christian psychiatrist Dr. Curt Thompson often emphasizes the need to pay attention to all parts of ourselves, integrating neuroscientific insight with spiritual formation.

Let’s illustrate integration with a **real-life scenario**: Imagine a woman named Sarah who suffers from moderate anxiety. Sarah decides to attack it on all fronts. She begins a morning routine of prayer and reading the Psalms to center her day on trust in God. She also joins a weekly Bible study for support and asks a few friends to pray for her specifically regarding her anxiety. At the same time, Sarah finds a Christian therapist who teaches her CBT techniques – together they identify that her perfectionism at work is a major stressor, and they work on setting healthier boundaries and reframing her self-talk. Sarah also starts walking for 30 minutes each evening and notices it helps her release tension. She cuts down on caffeine and switches to chamomile tea at night. To improve sleep, she institutes a wind-down routine with quiet music and prayer. After a couple of months, Sarah feels significantly better: her nightly panic attacks have stopped, she’s worrying less and trusting God more, and even others notice she’s calmer. She still has some anxious days, so she keeps up with counseling and her lifestyle habits. In a particularly rough patch, after praying about it and consulting her doctor, she takes an as-needed anxiety medication for a few weeks. This gets her through the crunch time at work, and she’s then able to taper off it. A year later, Sarah testifies that the combination of **faith, therapy, and lifestyle change** not only reduced her anxiety by, say, 70%, but also drew her closer to God. In her words, “Anxiety drove me to lean on Jesus like never before, and through counseling I learned how to renew my mind with His truth. I’m healthier spiritually and emotionally now than I was before the anxiety started.” Sarah’s story encapsulates how God can use a multi-faceted approach for good – as Romans 8:28 affirms, He works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

It’s also worth noting that sometimes anxiety might not fully disappear, but we learn to **manage it and still live abundantly**. The apostle Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” that God did not remove, instead teaching Paul that “*My grace is sufficient for you*” (2 Corinthians 12:9). For some, anxiety could be a thorn that keeps them dependent on God’s grace. But by applying these remedies, its sting can be greatly lessened, and it no longer controls their life. Many Christians find that as they emerge from intense anxiety, they develop greater empathy and ability to minister to others facing similar struggles (2 Corinthians 1:4). This is redemption – God bringing purpose out of our pain.



Practical Steps to Get Started:

If you are currently dealing with anxiety and unsure where to begin, here is a brief **action plan** integrating what we've discussed:

1. **Bring it to God:** Start by praying honestly about your anxiety. Tell God your fears and ask for His help. Commit to a daily quiet time – even 10-15 minutes in the morning – to read a Bible passage and pray. Scriptures like Psalms 27, 34, 91, Philippians 4, and Matthew 6:25-34 are great places to meditate. Consider memorizing one or two key verses that speak peace to you.
2. **Reach Out for Support:** Don't battle anxiety in isolation. Share with a trusted friend, pastor, or family member what you're going through. If you haven't yet, seek a counselor (Christian counseling centers or referrals from church can be good resources). If therapy isn't accessible, there are support groups and many excellent Christian books on anxiety that can guide you (for example, *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado or *The Anxiety Cure* by Dr. Archibald Hart). The important thing is to break the secrecy and shame – anxiety is a common human struggle, and help is available.
3. **Make Lifestyle Tweaks:** Pick one or two lifestyle changes to implement this week. Maybe you'll start going to bed by 10:30 pm to improve sleep. Or replace that second cup of coffee with a herbal tea. Or take a 15-minute walk during your lunch break instead of staying at your desk. Small changes add up. Treat your body kindly: nourish it with real food, move it regularly, and allow it to rest. As you do, say to yourself, *"I am caring for God's temple and He is restoring me."*
4. **Practice a Calming Technique Daily:** Choose a relaxation or grounding exercise and practice it even when you're not anxious, so it becomes second nature. This could be deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or a Christian meditation app that leads you through focusing on scripture with calm music. By practicing when calm, you'll be better able to use the technique in anxious moments. Also, incorporate worship into your routine – perhaps end your day by listening to a peaceful worship song, letting the truths wash over your mind.
5. **Evaluate and Adjust:** After a few weeks of these changes, evaluate how you feel. Are there improvements in your anxiety levels, even small ones? Celebrate those victories and give thanks to God. If something isn't helping or is too hard to maintain, adjust it. Healing is not always linear – there will be good days and bad days. But if overall you're moving in a positive direction, keep going. If you find your anxiety is still overwhelming or getting worse, consider that as feedback to possibly try a different approach or add another element (for example, maybe it's time to discuss medication, or maybe you realize an underlying issue like trauma that needs addressing in therapy). **Don't get discouraged** – view this as a journey with God. He is the Good Shepherd leading you beside still waters; sometimes the path winds a bit, but He is with you every step (Psalm 23).

Conclusion: Peace in Christ, Hope for the Future

Anxiety may be a formidable foe, but it is not greater than our God. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, offers us a peace that the world cannot give (John 14:27). Through an integrated approach – grounding ourselves in **faith**, applying **wisdom** in lifestyle and therapy, and embracing appropriate **medical help** when needed – we can overcome the grip of anxiety and reclaim the joyful, abundant life God intends for His children. It



doesn't mean we'll never feel anxious (even strong believers have bouts of anxiety), but we learn how to respond to it and not be mastered by it.

In times of panic, remember Peter stepping out of the boat: as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he walked on the waves, but when he focused on the storm, he began to sink. Jesus reached out immediately and caught him, saying, "Why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30-31). This story isn't to scold our lack of faith, but to illustrate that Jesus is right there to catch us when anxiety makes us sink. Our part is to refocus on Him again and again. Each time you choose to pray instead of purely worry, each time you go for a run or take your therapy homework seriously, think of it as stepping toward Jesus and away from the storm.

Your anxiety is not your destiny. It is a chapter, not the whole story. With God's help, you can learn to live above it. As you practice these natural remedies and lean on the Lord, you'll find that the promise of Philippians 4:7 becomes real: His peace will guard your heart and mind. You may even find, looking back, that anxiety drove you closer to God and taught you profound lessons about His grace. Many believers later echo the sentiment of Psalm 119:71, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." The trial of anxiety can refine your faith, making you more empathetic, prayerful, and dependent on God.

Take courage – **you are not alone in this fight.** Along with the millions who have walked this road, the Lord Jesus Himself experienced intense anxiety in Gethsemane – sweating blood and crying out in anguish – yet ultimately surrendered, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42-44). He knows exactly what you feel, and He intercedes for you. "Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Day by day, as you cast those cares and apply these principles, you will move closer to freedom. May the God of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way (2 Thessalonians 3:16), and may you soon testify to others of how He led you from anxiety to assurance.

***"I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears."* – Psalm 34:4 (NIV)**

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