

## **CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY**

### **Benzodiazepines**

All too commonly, anxiety is treated with prescribed benzodiazepine medications like Xanax (Alprazolam) and Ativan (Lorazepam). Benzodiazepines are a group of medicines sometimes used to treat anxiety, sleeping problems and other disorders. They work on the central nervous system, acting selectively on gamma-aminobutyric acid-A (GABA-A) receptors in the brain. They enhance response to the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA, by opening GABA-activated chloride channels and allowing chloride ions to enter the neuron, making the neuron negatively charged and resistant to excitation. Benzodiazepines are similar in pharmacological action but have different potencies. They are used as sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, anticonvulsants and muscle relaxants. They are the major class of compounds used in anxiety and they have remained the most commonly prescribed treatment for it, despite the fact that they may be habit-forming, can cause addiction, overdose, or even death.

The side effects are numerous. Below are only the most common side effects, and include some of which are symptoms of anxiety, itself, making one wonder how one benefits from taking such a medication:

Constipation, weight gain, nervousness, headache, skin rash, tremor, ataxia, depression, weight loss, dysarthria, memory impairment, cognitive dysfunction, drowsiness, fatigue, sedation, diarrhea, blurred vision, insomnia, anxiety, irritability, decreased libido, menstrual disease, increased appetite, and decreased appetite, forgetfulness; changes in patterns and rhythms of speech; clumsiness or unsteadiness; difficulty with coordination; discouragement; drowsiness; feeling sad or empty; irritability; lack of appetite; lightheadedness; loss of interest or pleasure; shakiness and unsteady walk; sleepiness or unusual drowsiness; slurred speech; tiredness; trouble concentrating; trouble speaking; trouble performing routine tasks; trouble sleeping; unsteadiness, trembling, or other problems with muscle control or coordination and unusual tiredness or weakness. (Drugs.com)

### **SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)**

Other anti-depressant medications such as Lexapro (Escitalopram) are also given to treat anxiety. This group of drugs are SSRIs, (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors). They prevent reuptake of serotonin and leave this neurotransmitter lingering longer in the synapse of the nerve cell. SSRIs take the serotonin that is already there and alter its uptake mechanism, in order to produce the desired effects - that being mood regulation. Depleted levels of neurotransmitters are often the reason why symptoms and conditions of anxiety arise and medications are used. Amino acids, which are the natural precursors to these neurotransmitters, do not affect uptake mechanisms. Instead, they increase the total pool of the neurotransmitter.

SSRIs also come with unwanted side effects - again, many of the symptoms one is already experiencing with anxiety. In rare cases: Coma; confusion; convulsions; decreased urine output; dizziness; fast or irregular heartbeat; headache; increased thirst; muscle pain or cramps; nausea or vomiting; shortness of breath; swelling of the face, ankles, or hands. More common side effects are: unusual tiredness or weakness, diarrhea, nausea, ejaculatory disorder, insomnia, headache, drowsiness, and delayed ejaculation, decreased interest in sexual intercourse, diarrhea, dry mouth, gas in the stomach, heartburn, inability to have or keep an erection, loss in sexual ability, desire, drive, or performance, unusual drowsiness and trouble sleeping.

The good news is, there are many other, more holistic options for dealing with anxiety. One is not limited to traveling down the slippery slope of popping a pill to decrease one symptom of a larger problem only to create other symptoms that require yet another pill to pop.