

22 eating and anxiety

for you to know

What you eat and drink can have an effect on your anxiety level. Some foods and beverages have a chemical makeup that can cause you to feel more anxious. Some foods and beverages have a chemical makeup that can help you to lower your anxiety.

Everyone's body is a little different from everyone else's. We each have a unique chemical makeup that reacts with the chemicals in everything we ingest. A number of substances have been linked to increased anxiety in many people. Some of these are caffeine, refined white sugar, refined white flour, alcohol, and some artificial sweeteners. A number of other substances have been linked to keeping anxiety low. Some of these are B-complex vitamins (such as niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, B-6, B-12, biotin, pantothenic acid, and folic acid), calcium, magnesium, omega-3 fatty acids, and complex carbohydrates.

You may be aware of ingesting some of these substances. When you sprinkle sugar on your cereal, you know you are eating sugar. Other substances have unfamiliar names and are not so obvious. Most people do not know when they are ingesting folic acid. To be fully aware of everything you are putting into your body, you may have to read the labels on the packages of the foods you eat. To learn more about their chemical makeup, you can also look up individual foods in an encyclopedia or a book on nutrition, or on the Internet.

Some of the more common foods that contain these substances are listed below.

Substances that may raise your anxiety level and foods they are found in:

Caffeine: coffee, tea, chocolate, soda

Refined white sugar: nondiet soda, candy, cookies, cakes, ice cream, other desserts,
sugar-coated cereals

Refined white flour: white bread and rolls, hamburger buns, spaghetti and other
white pasta, pretzels

Alcohol: beer, wine, hard liquor

Artificial sweeteners: diet soda, most foods labeled "diet," many sugar-free
products, cereals

Substances that may lower your anxiety level and foods they are found in:

Niacin: chicken, turkey, wheat, brown rice, tuna

Thiamin: oats, wheat, pork, tuna, asparagus, sunflower seeds, white rice

Riboflavin: milk, yogurt, pork, avocados, mushrooms

Vitamin B-6: turkey, bananas, mangoes, sunflower seeds, sweet potatoes,
tuna, pork

Vitamin B-12: beef, yogurt, tuna, crab, clams

Biotin: eggs, cheese, peanuts, cauliflower

Pantothenic acid: yogurt, avocados, salmon, sunflower seeds, mushrooms

Folic acid: turkey, oranges, peas, avocados, cabbage, broccoli, soybeans

Calcium: milk, yogurt, cheese, broccoli, spinach

Magnesium: spinach, almonds, avocados, sunflower seeds, Brazil nuts

Omega-3 fatty acids: tuna, salmon, sardines, walnuts, dark green leafy vegetables,
soybeans

Complex carbohydrates: whole-grain breads, whole-grain cereals, whole-grain
pasta, brown rice

more to do

Looking back at your diary, describe the difference between the number of anxiety-raising substances you ingested and the number of anxiety-lowering substances you ingested.

Look at the times when you rated yourself as highly anxious. Then look at your food intake for the twenty-four hours preceding that. Describe any connection you notice between high anxiety and what you ate or drank.

Look at the times when you rated your anxiety as very low. Then look at your food intake for the twenty-four hours preceding that. Describe any connection you notice between low anxiety and what you ate or drank.

Do you see any patterns in your anxiety level and food or beverage intake? Yes No

Sometimes people's favorite foods are those that raise anxiety. It can be hard to give those up completely, but even cutting back on anxiety-raising substances can be helpful. Think about some specific, realistic ways you can ingest fewer substances that raise your anxiety level, and describe those ways here.

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Think about some specific, realistic ways you can ingest more substances that lower your anxiety level, and describe those ways here.

This activity provided you with only a partial list of foods that may raise or lower anxiety. You can get a more complete list from a dietitian or a nutritionist or from reading materials they suggest.