

Natural Strategies for Anxiety, Sleep, and Mood Support

Boosting “Happy” Hormones Naturally

- **Dopamine** – the “motivation” hormone linked to reward and drive. Pursuing goals (even small ones) releases dopamine ¹ ² . To boost it, set achievable daily goals (a hobby project, exercise milestone) and celebrate progress. New activities or learning skills also trigger dopamine. Regular exercise and laughter likewise increase dopamine (and endorphins) naturally ³ ⁴ .
- **Serotonin** – a mood-stabilizing hormone. Sunlight exposure (about 10–15 min outdoors daily) raises serotonin production ⁵ . Moderate aerobic exercise (e.g. brisk walking or yoga) also increases serotonin (and endorphins) ³ . Psychology-wise, building confidence by focusing on personal “wins” or positive experiences raises serotonin ⁶ . Eating foods high in tryptophan (e.g. turkey, eggs, nuts) and probiotics (yogurt, kimchi) supports serotonin synthesis ⁷ .
- **Oxytocin** – the “bonding” hormone of trust and affection. Physical touch (hugs, petting animals) and close social connection trigger oxytocin release ⁸ . Spending quality time with loved ones, confiding in a friend, or doing small acts of kindness (sending a caring note) gently boost it ⁹ ¹⁰ . Activities like massage or even massage chairs can increase oxytocin (and serotonin) ¹⁰ . Volunteering or group activities that build trust also help.
- **Endorphins** – the body’s natural “painkillers” and pleasure chemicals. Vigorous exercise (“runner’s high”) strongly boosts endorphins ¹¹ . Less intense boosts include laughing (watching a comedy or sharing jokes) and social bonding ¹² ⁴ . Other simple triggers are spicy foods or dark chocolate (endorphin release from mild “pleasure-pain”) ¹² ⁷ , and relaxation exercises (deep breathing, yoga) ¹² . In short, do enjoyable activities – play with children or pets, dance, create art, or watch an engaging movie – to spark endorphins.

Gentle Natural Supplements (Canada-available)

- **Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)** – an adaptogenic herb that lowers cortisol and eases anxiety. Clinical studies show 250–600 mg/day of a root extract (standardized to withanolides) reduces stress and cortisol ¹³ . In practice, start with ~300 mg once or twice daily (many Canadian brands like AOR or NOW carry it). Take with meals. Ashwagandha is generally well-tolerated short-term; side effects (if any) are mild (digestive upset). Avoid if pregnant or hyperthyroid, and consult a doctor if on medications.
- **Omega-3 (EPA/DHA fish oil)** – essential fatty acids supporting brain health. A number of studies/meta-analyses find 1–2 g/day of EPA+DHA helps improve mood and anxiety ¹⁴ ¹⁵ . Look for a high-quality fish oil or algae-based supplement (e.g. 1000 mg capsule with ~600 mg EPA, 400 mg DHA). Take with food to reduce fishy burps. Side effects are minimal (occasional upset stomach; avoid if bleeding disorders without doctor advice ¹⁶). A regular regimen may aid long-term stress resilience.
- **Vitamin D** – regulates serotonin and circadian rhythms. Low vitamin D is linked to depression and anxiety ¹⁷ . Many adults (especially in Canada) are deficient. If levels are low, supplementing 1000–2000 IU daily is common. Good sources are oily fish or fortified foods; supplements should be D3

form. While high doses require monitoring, moderate daily supplementation is safe. Aim for blood 25(OH)D in the mid-normal range.

- **Vitamin B-complex** – the eight B vitamins support neurotransmitter production. Low B12 (and other B's) correlates with higher depression/anxiety ¹⁸. A balanced B100 or B50 complex (with folate, B6, etc.) can ensure adequate levels. These are water-soluble (excess excreted) and generally safe. Taking a B-complex daily (with meals) can help energy and stress tolerance. Ensure B12 (especially if vegetarian) and folate (for methylation) are included, as they are critical for serotonin and dopamine synthesis.
- **Magnesium** – a calming mineral needed for nerve function. Some studies suggest it may ease anxiety ¹⁹. Forms like magnesium glycinate or taurate are gentler on the stomach. Start low (e.g. 100 mg elemental at bedtime) and increase gradually (up to ~200–300 mg/day) ¹⁹. Do not exceed ~350 mg/day without medical advice (high doses can cause diarrhea ¹⁹). Magnesium also aids sleep quality, so it can be taken in the evening.
- **L-theanine** – an amino acid in tea that promotes relaxation. At 100–200 mg (about 1–2 capsules) taken before bed or during a stressful period, it increases alpha brain waves and raises GABA, dopamine and serotonin levels ²⁰ ²¹. Clinical trials show 200 mg L-theanine lowers stress and cortisol in challenging situations ²¹. It's non-sedating (you stay alert but calm). Do not exceed 400 mg/day without doctor supervision ²². Available in capsule form or just drink a cup of decaffeinated green tea.
- **GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)** – the main inhibitory neurotransmitter. Supplements are available and are generally safe (at doses like 250–500 mg) ²³. Although it's unclear how much oral GABA crosses into the brain, many sensitive individuals find it calming. Cleveland Clinic notes GABA is “known for producing a calming effect” and helps control anxiety and stress ²⁴. If tolerated, a small dose in the evening may support relaxation (avoid mixing with other sedatives). Evidence is anecdotal, but it's low-risk for most.
- **Rhodiola Rosea** – an adaptogen that reduces stress fatigue. Typical dose is 100–200 mg once or twice daily (standardized to 3% rosavins) ²⁵. Doses up to 600 mg/day have been used safely. It can improve mood and stamina under stress, but in high doses it may be mildly stimulating, so morning or midday dosing is ideal. Side effects are rare (occasional jitteriness or insomnia if taken too late).
- **Valerian root** – a mild sedative herb for sleep. Valerian extract (300–600 mg at bedtime) improves sleep quality in many people ²⁶. It's likely safe short-term; common side effects are sleepiness or vivid dreams next day ²⁷. Use intermittently (not nightly long-term) to avoid tolerance. Valerian can potentiate other sedatives, so skip if already taking strong sleep meds.
- **Chamomile or Lemon Balm tea** – gentle herbal teas can soothe the nervous system. A warm cup of chamomile before bed may ease anxiety and insomnia. (German chamomile tea is widely available.) Lemon balm (Melissa) tea is another mild relaxant. While evidence is modest, these are very low-risk ways to wind down.
- **Other Nutrients:** Collagen peptides (for gut and skin health) and SAMe (S-adenosylmethionine) are supplements she has used. Collagen (10 g/day) is well-tolerated and supports overall wellness. SAMe (400 mg) has research for mood improvement, but it can raise serotonin so needs caution if combined with other serotonin-affecting treatments. Because the wife is sensitive, any new supplement should be started at a low dose and monitored. Look for Canadian-made products (e.g. AOR, Genuine Health, Jamieson) or reputable international brands.

Sleep Hygiene & Stress-Resilience Habits

- **Consistent Schedule:** Go to bed and wake at the same times each day (even weekends). This regularity reinforces the circadian rhythm ²⁸. Aim for 7–8 hours of sleep per night if possible.
- **Relaxing Bedtime Routine:** Wind down 30–60 minutes before bed. Gentle reading, stretching, deep-breathing or a warm bath can signal your body to sleep. Avoid screen time (TV/computer/phone) in bed – blue light tricks the brain into “daytime” mode ²⁹.
- **Optimize the Bedroom:** Keep the room cool (around 16–19°C), dark (blackout curtains) and quiet. Remove electronics and clutter. A comfortable mattress and pillows matter – replace them if needed ²⁹. White noise or soft music can help sensitive sleepers.
- **Daylight and Exercise:** Get some natural sunlight early in the day to regulate melatonin. Daily physical activity (even a brisk walk or yoga) improves sleep and mood ²⁸. Avoid vigorous exercise late at night (finish workouts 3–4 hours before bed).
- **Diet and Stimulants:** Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) after mid-afternoon, as it can linger for 6–8 hours ³⁰. Steer clear of heavy or spicy meals, alcohol, or large liquids close to bedtime, which disrupt sleep ³¹. If the wife is sensitive to food additives (artificial sweeteners, MSG, etc.), read labels and keep a food diary to identify triggers.
- **Stress Management:** A short journaling session before bed to “dump” worries onto paper can quiet the mind. Regular mindfulness or meditation (even 5–10 minutes of deep breathing) calms the nervous system. Techniques like progressive muscle relaxation or guided imagery at bedtime may help sensitive people unwind. If emotions feel overwhelming, gentle therapy methods (e.g. CBT exercises, EMDR, or even hypnotherapy) can build resilience.
- **Social Support:** Strong connections reduce stress. Share daily experiences with a trusted friend or family member. Even talking through a concern can lower stress hormones. Loving pets, warm baths, cuddling, or hugging release oxytocin and help counter anxiety.

Escitalopram (5 mg) – Pros and Cons

Overview: Escitalopram (Lexapro) is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) prescribed for depression and generalized anxiety disorder. It works by increasing serotonin in the brain, which can improve mood and anxiety over time. A common starting dose is 10 mg/day, but a lower dose (5 mg) is sometimes used for very sensitive individuals or older adults. Patients typically need at least 4–6 weeks of therapy before noticing benefits ³².

Pros: Many people experience reduced anxiety and better mood on escitalopram. It has a well-established safety profile in adults. Low doses may minimize side effects. For persistent or severe symptoms, an SSRI can provide stable relief that natural methods alone might not achieve.

Cons: Side effects are relatively common. Typical side effects include **gastrointestinal upset** (nausea, diarrhea), **sleep changes** (either drowsiness or insomnia), and **sexual side effects** (reduced libido or difficulty with orgasm) ³³ ³⁴. These often improve after a few weeks, but can be bothersome. Rare but serious issues include increased agitation or suicidal thoughts especially when first starting ³⁵. Importantly, **don’t stop abruptly**: sudden cessation can cause discontinuation syndrome (dizziness, irritability, insomnia) ³⁶.

In summary, **escitalopram** can be effective for anxiety/depression but must be weighed against possible side effects. At 5 mg, effects may be milder and side effects fewer, but it may also take longer or be less

potent. Discussing with a doctor is essential. If using it, regular follow-up is needed to adjust dosing and monitor mood. Meanwhile, continuing the above gentle strategies (sleep routine, supplements, therapy) can support emotional balance, whether or not a medication is used.

Sources: Authoritative health sources and clinical studies have been cited above, including medical reviews and consensus recommendations ¹³ ³³ ¹⁷ ²¹. These reflect current understanding of hormone boosters, supplements, and SSRI therapy.

¹ ² ⁶ ⁸ ⁹ ¹¹ ¹² **How to “Hack Your Brain” to Produce More Happiness Chemicals - CASSY**
<https://cassybayarea.org/how-to-hack-your-brain-to-produce-more-happiness-chemicals/>

³ ⁴ ⁵ ⁷ ¹⁰ **Happy Hormones: What They Are and How to Boost Them**
<https://www.healthline.com/health/happy-hormone>

¹³ **Ashwagandha: Is it helpful for stress, anxiety, or sleep? - Health Professional Fact Sheet**
<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Ashwagandha-HealthProfessional/>

¹⁴ **Omega-3 fatty acids for mood disorders - Harvard Health**
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/omega-3-fatty-acids-for-mood-disorders-2018080314414>

¹⁵ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ¹⁹ ²¹ ²² **Supplements for anxiety: Best types and evidence**
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/325823>

¹⁶ **Omega-3 and Depression: Benefits, Side Effects, and Uses**
<https://www.healthline.com/health/omega-3-depression>

²⁰ **L-Theanine for Sleep**
<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-aids/l-theanine-for-sleep>

²³ ²⁴ **Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid (GABA): What It Is, Function & Benefits**
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22857-gamma-aminobutyric-acid-gaba>

²⁵ **Rhodiola: Health Benefits, Uses, Doses, Safety Information, and More**
<https://www.webmd.com/diet/health-benefits-rhodiola>

²⁶ ²⁷ **VALERIAN: Overview, Uses, Side Effects, Precautions, Interactions, Dosing and Reviews**
<https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-870/valerian>

²⁸ ²⁹ ³⁰ ³¹ **Tips for beating anxiety to get a better night’s sleep - Harvard Health**
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/tips-for-beating-anxiety-to-get-a-better-nights-sleep>

³² ³³ ³⁴ **Escitalopram (oral route) - Mayo Clinic**
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/drugs-supplements/escitalopram-oral-route/description/drg-20063707>

³⁵ **Escitalopram: MedlinePlus Drug Information**
<https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a603005.html>

³⁶ **Escitalopram (Lexapro): Uses, Side Effects, Interactions, Pictures, Warnings & Dosing - WebMD**
<https://www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-63990/lexapro-oral/details>