

The Top Natural Anti-Anxiety Supplements Pretty much everyone has felt uneasy at some point in their life. We call this state of inner turmoil anxiety. It's a normal emotion that tends to kick up when we dread future events, causing us to worry, be restless, and have difficulty concentrating.

It's almost like fear, except that instead of being scared and reacting to current events, you worry about future events — you're scared of what you think will happen. And that's a key part of anxiety, it's subjective. What one person is anxious about may not be what you are anxious about.

Again, experiencing anxiety is normal. Where it becomes a mental condition is when the anxiety persists for months on-end, at which point it becomes an anxiety disorder. These can be general anxiety, a specific phobia, social anxiety, or panic disorders. You may even have more than one.

About 1 in 20 adults in the world suffers from some type of anxiety disorder, with the rate increasing to roughly 1 in 16 adults in the US [1]. Current treatments revolve around forms of psychotherapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, and a variety of drugs like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), benzodiazepines, tricyclic antidepressants, mild tranquilizers, and beta-blockers [2].

Given the adverse effects associated with pharmacological interventions, a growing body of research has looked to botanicals and other naturally occurring compounds as a means to help alleviate anxiety. In this article, we're going to discuss some supplements that could help put your worrying mind to rest.

Anti-anxiety Botanicals

Botanicals are plants valued for their medicinal properties, flavors, or scents. Common herbs and spices are probably the best-known examples. They can be consumed as teas, tinctures, extracts, or in their natural state.

There are at least 53 plants that have shown efficacy in reducing anxiety, 32 of which have solely preclinical evidence in animal models and 21 of which have clinical trial data from interventions with humans [3,4]. While we won't cover all of these, we will talk about some of the most promising.

Passionflower



Passionflower (Passiflora incarnata Linneaus) has been used for thousands of years by Native Americans as a sedative and treatment for anxiety [5]. The leaves and roots of the flower were traditionally brewed into tea, while dried powders and extracts are commonly used today.

While the precise mechanism of action for passionflower's anxiolytic effects hasn't been established, the current belief is that its phytochemical constituents bind to and activate GABA receptors, similar to benzodiazepines [6].

For example, in adults with **generalized anxiety disorder**, 45 drops of a passionflower tincture was just as effective as a benzodiazepine (oxazepam) for reducing anxiety, with both cutting anxiety scores by half after just 2 weeks and by nearly 75% after 4 weeks [7].



Similarly, in **adults going through opiate withdrawal**, detoxifying with clonidine (helps minimize withdrawal symptoms) plus 60 drops of a passionflower tincture was more effective at reducing mental symptoms than using the drug alone [8].



Several other studies have reported that 360–700 mg of passionflower helps blunt the normal spike in **preoperative anxiety** when taken 30–90 minutes before general [9], spinal [10], and dental surgery [11]. One of these studies even suggested the effect was comparable to a benzodiazepine (midazolam) [11].

Overall, passionflower has drug-like anxiolytic effects in both those who have anxiety disorders and in regular adults that are undergoing stressful events like surgery. It's effects not only appear to work with continuous supplementation, but also in the hour or two following a single dose.

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Chamomile



Chamomile is a daisy-like flower traditionally brewed into tea and used to treat a variety of ailments, particularly those characterized by inflammation and oxidative stress [12]. It's also been used as a mild sedative to calm nerves and reduce anxiety.

Subsequent research has since validated these traditional uses.

Studies in rats have shown that chamomile's bioactive constituents interact with GABA and benzodiazepine receptors within the brain [13], thereby having sedating effects similar to passionflower.

A group of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine have published several studies in **adults with generalized anxiety disorder** demonstrating the clinical efficacy of chamomile. It started with a small placebo-controlled pilot study, in which 1100 mg/d of chamomile was shown to cut anxiety in half after 8 weeks [14].



In a larger follow-up study, the researchers confirmed their previous findings — after 8 weeks of supplementing with 1500 mg/d of chamomile, the participants had their anxiety cut in half and improved several other aspects of mental well-being [15]. Basically, the average participant went from having moderate-to-severe anxiety down to barely mild anxiety.



To really hammer this point home, here's another way to look at these findings. When the study started, about 84% of participants had moderate anxiety and 15% had marked anxiety. After just 2 months of using chamomile, almost none had marked anxiety, only 18% had moderate anxiety, 21% had mild anxiety, and 60% either had no anxiety or borderline anxiety.



So, in their third and final study, the researchers took a group of these participants who had their anxiety reduced by at least 50% and had them continue taking the chamomile or start on a placebo for another 6 months [16]. Those who continued with chamomile were 48% less likely to relapse with anxiety symptoms compared to those using the placebo. Moreover, the average time to relapse was 3 months in those using chamomile, compared to just 6 weeks in the placebo group.

In short, regular consumption of chamomile can help alleviate anxiety in many individuals who have an anxiety disorder.

Chamomile can help alleviate anxiety in those with anxiety disorders if taken regularly for several months.

Lemon Balm



Lemon balm (*Melissa* officinalis) is a plant native to the Meditteranean basin and central Asia, where it was traditionally used for the treatment of mental disorders and any complaints relating to the central nervous system [17].

Today, it is commonly used to promote sedation, but researchers haven't yet pinned down the mechanism through which it acts [18]. The most promising

explanation is that lemon balm inhibits GABA transaminase, which is the enzyme that degrades GABA, and thereby increases GABA signaling within the brain [19].

Several studies in **otherwise healthy adults** have found that taking 300–1600 mg of lemon balm prevents declines in calmness in the hours following supplementation [20,21], particularly when subjected to stressful situations [22,23].

Other studies have found that 3000 mg/d of lemon balm for 8 weeks reduces anxiety and stress in **adults with heart problems** [24], and that 1200 mg/d for 3 months reduces anxiety in **adolescent girls dealing with PMS** [25].



In **adults with mild-to-moderate anxiety**, supplementing with 600 mg/d of lemon balm for just 2 weeks improved numerous anxiety manifestations, such as tension and agitation, and anxiety-associated symptoms, such as psychosomatic problems, intellectual disturbances, and feelings of guilt or inferiority [26].



Overall, lemon balm can help with maintaining a cool head when taken before stressful situations and can help lower overall feelings of stress and anxiety when taken regularly, both in healthy adults and those with anxiety disorders. Lemon balm can help with maintaining a cool head when taken before stressful situations and can help lower overall feelings of stress and anxiety when taken regularly, both in healthy adults and those with anxiety disorders.

Ginkgo Biloba



Ginkgo biloba is a tree native to China that's been around since at least the Triassic period roughly 270 million years ago. The ginkgo nuts were both eaten as a food and used in traditional medicine for the treatment of

circulatory problems and cognitive decline.

Most of the research on ginkgo revolves around alleviating cognitive decline and staving off dementia. However, several of these studies have reported that gingko doesn't just improve cognitive function, but also reduces psychological symptoms like anxiety [27].

The reductions in anxiety may be due to how ginkgo interacts with our stress centers in the brain and the adrenal glands. That is, ginkgo appears to inhibit the secretion of corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) [28], the overactivation of which causes anxiety-like behavior in rodents and is associated with anxiety in humans [29,30]. Only one study to date has looked at how ginkgo supplementation affects **adults with moderate-to-severe anxiety** [31]. Over the course of a month, the participants supplemented with either ginkgo biloba (240 or 480 mg of the EGb-761 extract) or a placebo. Anxiety dropped like a rock with both doses, although the higher one tended to fare better.



Overall, 81% of those using 480 mg of ginkgo and 67% of those using 240 mg either "very much" or "much" improved their anxiety when evaluated by a clinician, compared to just 38% of those using the placebo.

Ginkgo biloba appears to reduce anxiety in those with dementia and anxiety disorders when taken regularly for several months.

Ashwagandha



Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) is a nightshade revered in Ayurvedic medicine for its physicaland mental-enhancing effects. Today, it's considered an adaptogen for similar reasons, able to increase one's resilience to stress and help reduce anxiety.

These effects are largely due to its constituent withanolide structures, which have several important neuroprotective effects within the brain, such as scavenging free radicals, reducing neuroinflammation, and promoting neurotransmitter signaling [32]. When it comes to anxiety, these molecules also bind to and activate GABA receptors [33].

And these effects appear to be pretty potent, particularly in anyone who is dealing with high amounts of stress or anxiety [34,35]. For example, in **adults with chronic mental stress**, supplementing with 600 mg/d of ashwagandha (KSM-66 extract) reduced perceived stress by 40% and feelings of anxiety by 70% compared to a placebo after just 2 months [36]!



Several other studies of **stressed adults with mild anxiety** have found similar anxiolytic benefits after just 2–3 months of supplementation — 60% reduction in anxiety with 240 mg of a concentrated ashwagandha extract (shoden extract) [37], 15% reduction with 600 mg of regular ashwagandha powder [38], and a 20% reduction with 600 mg of a concentrated extract (KSM-66 extract) [39].

In **adults with generalized anxiety disorder**, taking 1000 mg/d of ashwagandha powder cut anxiety by 50% after 6 weeks, bringing the average anxiety level down from severe to mild [40]. In fact, the number of participants with severe anxiety dropped from 67% to 5% and the number with mild anxiety increased from 10% to 72%.



Ashwagandha is an effective anxiolytic supplement for anyone dealing with an anxiety disorder or chronic stress.

Ashwagandha is an adaptogen that effectively reduces anxiety in those dealing with chronic stress or an anxiety disorder.

Rhodiola Rosea

Rhodiola is a medicinal herb traditionally used for enhancing mental performance and resilience to stress [41], effects that are due to the numerous ways rhodiola interacts with genes, signaling pathways, and molecular networks within neuronal cells to alter emotional behavior [42].



Specifically, rhodiola acts within the brain as a neuroprotective, cognitive enhancing, and mood stabilizing agent through reducing neuronal cell death and promoting regeneration, functioning as an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, facilitating neurotransmission, and regulating several key mediators of the stress response within the hypothalamic-pituitary axis [43–45].

These effects lend rhodiola some of the most potent adaptogenic and anxiolytic abilities in the botanical supplement garden. For example, in **adults with chronic work- and life-related stress**, 400 mg/d of rhodiola reduced feelings of exhaustion, irritability, and anxiety in as little as three days, ultimately cutting them in half after just one month [46].



Even in less stressed individuals, rhodiola may have some benefit. In **mildly anxious university students**, for example, 400 mg/d of rhodiola reduced anxiety by about 10% after just 2 weeks, as well as self-reported stress, anger, confusion, and depression [47].

Lastly, **in adults with generalized anxiety disorder**, taking 340 mg/d of rhodiola reduced anxiety by 40% after 10 weeks [48]. In fact, 40% of the participants were able to put their anxiety disorder into remission.

Rhodiola Rosea is a potent adaptogen that improves stress resilience and reduces anxiety, particularly in those with stressful lives or anxiety disorders.

Theanine



Okay, so L-theanine isn't a botanical, but it does come from one — it's a naturally occurring amino acid found in tea that alters neurotransmitter signaling within the brain. After consumption, it crosses the blood-brain barrier, interferes with excitatory glutamate signaling, stimulates dopamine release, and promotes inhibitory neurotransmission, thereby helping promote a state of relaxation [49,50].

In fact, electroencephalography (EEG) studies have shown that theanine shifts brain waves towards alpha oscillatory patterns indicative of a relaxed state, particularly in those with high levels of baseline anxiety [51–55].

Brain Way	res Frequency	Mental Condition		Control (water)	L-theanine (50mg)	
δ-wave	0.5~3H z	∫∽ I Sound sleep	45			
θ-wave	1sec 4~7H z	Mr∿ I Doze sleep	60			0.7 0.6 0.5 0.4 μV ²
		- -	75			0.3 µV 0.2 0.1 0
α-wave	MMMMM MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM	Awake, relaxation	90			
β-wave	14Hz~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~	Awake, excitation	105 minutes			
Juneja et al. Trends Food Sci Tech. 1999; 10(6-7): 199-204.			Nobre et al. Asia Pac J Clin Nutr. 2008; 17 Suppl 1: 167-8.			

Accordingly, several studies have found that theanine supplementation improves feelings of relaxation, tension, calmness, and anxiety in the hours following doses of 200–600 mg [56,57].

L-theanine is an amino acid found in tea that improves feelings of relaxation, tension, calmness, and anxiety.

Psychedelic Botanicals

Psychedelic botanicals are a special class of plants that don't just temporarily alleviate stress and anxiety or increase one's resilience to them, but literally change brain signaling and function in ways that alter our state of consciousness.

They do this by potently activating serotonin receptors in the brain [58], which affect the activity of key brain circuits involved in sensory perception and cognition. While there's numerous psychedelic substances in existence, our focus is on just two of the best-researched: psilocin from magic mushrooms and DMT from ayahuasca.



The reason we're mentioning psychedelics as an anxiolytic remedy is because one of the most commonly described features of a psychedelic trip is ego death, or the complete loss of subjective selfidentity. Sounds scary, right? The unknown usually is.

Can you imagine having a fundamental transformation of your psyche? A death and rebirth or self-surrender and transition, if you will. By virtue of stripping away ego defense mechanisms and the associations we have developed between ideas, emotions, and our identity, psychedelics help us transcend mental baggage that could very well be your unresolving anxiety or depression.

Psychedelics basically alter our perceptions, mood, and behavior in ways that can be rewarding and pleasant — a euphoria, if you will — and they may even be able to permanently rewire our brains in ways that can fundamentally alter how we operate in the world.

Again, while it sounds scary, it can be a Godsend for individuals who have been struggling with their mental health for their entire life and have been unresponsive to other forms of treatment, so much so that some researchers and psychiatrists are insisting on using psychedelics in clinical practice [59–61].

So, with all that said, let's explore some of the ever-growing psychiatric literature on ayahuasca and magic mushrooms.

Ayahuasca



Ayahuasca is a brewed beverage long used by indigenous South African populations for mystical and therapeutic purposes, including self-exploration and the healing of mental health conditions [62,63].

The ceremonial brew is a combination of two Amazonian plant species that work together to alter consciousness [64]:

- 1) Psychotria viridis contains the psychedelic compound, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which works primarily through binding and activating serotonin receptors.
- 2) Banisteriopsis caapi contains powerful monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors, called beta-carbolines, which prevent MAO from breaking down DMT, serotonin, and dopamine, thereby greatly increasing the signaling activity of these molecules.

Basically, ayahuasca functions to significantly enhance and prolong serotonin signaling within the brain, giving it hallucinogenic and psychedelic properties.

A large and ever-growing body of literature has shown that longterm use of ayahuasca is associated with enhanced mood, reduced anxiety, improved cognition, increased spirituality, and reduced impulsivity [65,66].

Clinical studies, for example, have shown that a single ayahuasca session causes drastic 60–70% reductions in depression and anxiety in individuals suffering from recurrent, treatment-resistant depression [67–69]. Not just during the session itself, but for at least 3 weeks afterwards.



In other studies, researchers have documented a 48% reduction in minor psychiatric symptoms 1–2 weeks after using ayahuasca [70], which persisted for at least 6 months of afterwards, along with improvements in mental health, confidence, and optimism [71].

In a study of individuals using ayahuasca for the first time, 61% of those who had a psychiatric disorder before use no longer met diagnostic criteria just one month afterwards, and this effect persisted for at least six months [72]. Ultimately, 83% of the participants experienced a clinical improvement in their mental health.

Many of these benefits seem to come from how ayahuasca impacts serotonin signaling within the brain. For example, ayahuasca

upregulates platelet serotonin transporters [73], the low expression of which has been associated with addiction, depression, and suicidal behavior [74,75].

Similarly, ayahuasca causes functional connectivity changes within the brain associated with enhanced mindfulness capacities [76–78]. The ability of ayahuasca to alter our ego defenses and be more mindful may be a huge way in which it benefits mental health.

For example, in one study researchers compared the mental effects of using ayahuasca to completing 8 weeks of mindfulness training [79]. While mindfulness training had an overall greater impact on mindfulness capacities, those using ayahuasca experienced spontaneous increases in all of the mindfulness domains, particularly those of acceptance.



This is a rather important finding because increasing acceptance enables us to attain a non-evaluative stance towards experiences of "being." It allows us to acknowledge our thoughts and emotions without getting carried away by them, no matter how painful these may be. To hit this point home, imagine the grief you'd feel if a loved one you were close to passed away. Ayahuasca could help you overcome that grief and be more accepting of the situation that is causing you distress. In fact, that's exactly what one study found.

A group of researchers assessed the mental status of adults struggling to overcome their grief before and up to a year after attending a ceremonial ayahuasca retreat under the guidance of traditional shaman healers [80]. Just 2 weeks after attending the retreat, grief was reduced by 25% and this effect was maintained for at least a year afterwards.



The reductions in grief were accompanied by reductions in every aspect of psychiatric health, including anxiety and depression, improvements in quality of life, increases in emotional acceptance, and an enhanced ability to observe one's thoughts and feelings in a detached manner.

In short, ayahuasca is able to alter brain function and connectivity in ways that facilitate mindfulness and improve mental health, not just

during the session itself, but for months and maybe even years afterwards.

Ayahuasca is a traditional Amazonian beverage that alters brain function and connectivity in ways that facilitate mindfulness and improve mental health, not just during the session itself, but for months and maybe even years afterwards.

Psilocybe



Psilocybe is a genus of mushroom containing the psychedelic compounds: psilocybin and psilocin. Native American sharmans of Central America would traditionally ingest these "sacred" mushrooms as a means of better assessing the problems facing their society.

You don't need a lot, either. The psychedelic effects begin to occur with just 1–2 grams of magic mushrooms [81]. As with other psychedelics, the hallucinogenic and euphoric feelings are a result of enhanced serotonin signaling within the brain.

Like with ayahuasca, there is a growing body of research suggesting that 'shrooms may have clinical applications for the treatment of mental health disorders, including obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, and depression [82]. For example, imagine being a middle-aged man with clinical OCD and anxiety who failed to be successfully treated with counseling or medications on multiple occasions. Imagine going through your day with a consistent pattern of intrusive and disturbing thoughts, checking behaviors, and worry. Imagine having this anxiety and OCD manifest at least 100 times per day every day, interrupting whatever task you were trying to accomplish each time.



This is an actual person [83]. A married man who could not work and who lost most of his social contacts due to his debilitating condition. Yet, in a desperate attempt for relief, he took some 'shrooms that his friend gave him, and experienced significant relief from his OCD and anxiety for weeks afterwards. He told his doctor that he used 'shrooms about every 3 weeks as a means of keeping his symptoms at bay, and remained symptom free for a year of follow-up.

Now, obviously a case study of a single person is not strong evidence, but this isn't the only evidence supporting anti-OCD and anxiolytic effects of 'shrooms. For example, another study of adults with treatment-resistant OCD reported that two-thirds of patients had their symptoms reduced by at least 50% in the day following psilocybin use [84].

More promising, however, is the research in patients with terminal cancer. It's hard to think of something more anxiety-provoking than laying on your deathbed and waiting for your final day to come. The existential crisis of terminal disease causes massive psychological distress.

So, in the first of its kind study, researchers from UCLA recruited anxious individuals with terminal cancer and had them supplement with psilocybin or placebo on two separate occasions [85]. Psilocybin reduced anxiety 20% and depression by 25–50% for 3–6 months after treatment. The effects were so noticeable by the participants that they requested a second psilocybin session to reinforce the positive experiences.



Five years later, researchers from New York University followed up on this research, again recruiting adults with life-threatening cancer to take psilocybin or placebo and follow them for nine months after treatment [86]. Once again, there was a rapid and sustained drop in the participants' anxiety and depression following psilocybin — 70% of the participants cut their anxiety by at least 50% and 80% put their depression into remission, all 9 months after a single session with psilocybin.



Around this same time, researchers from Johns Hopkins University published a similar study in adults with life-threatening cancer [87]. Once again, a single session with psilocybin reduced anxiety, depression, and mood disturbances by 50–70% for six months after treatment.



Lastly, we have a study out of Imperial College London where researchers recruited adults with moderate-to-severe treatmentresistant depression and have them take psilocybin twice, separate by one week [88]. Depression severity dropped like a rock, decreasing by 60% within the first week and remaining reduced by 50% after 3 months.



Ultimately, magic mushrooms provide substantial psychological relief to those who need it, those who haven't responded favorably to conventional treatments are suffering with anxiety and depression as a result. Just a single session can provide long-lasting benefits.

Psilocybe are "magic mushrooms" traditionally used in Native American shamanic rituals. They notably reduce anxiety and depression in those who have been unresponsive to conventional treatments, with single sessions providing relief for months afterwards.

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Rhodiola Extract (Rhodiola rosea) (3% salidrosides and 1% rosavins)	400 mg	**
Lion's Mane (Hericium erinaceus) (fruiting bodies)	1500 mg	**
Alpha-GPC (50%)	300 mg	**
Choline-CDP (Citicoline)	300 mg	**
Bacopa Extract (Bacopa monnieri) (leaf) (standardized to 50% bacopa glycosides)	300 mg	**
Ginkgo Extract (Ginkgo biloba) (24% flavone glycosides & 6% terpene lactones)	250 mg	**
NeuroFactor™ Whole Coffee Fruit Extract (Coffee Arabica)	100 mg	**
Huperzine A (from Huperzia serrata whole plant extract)	100 mcg	**
Acetyl-L-Carnitine	700 mg	**
Trimethylglycine	700 mg	**
Saffron Extract (Crocus sativus) (2% safranal)	30 mg	**
Uridine Monophosphate	100 mg	**
GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)	100 mg	**
Agmatine Sulfate	600 mg	**
Polygala Tenuifolia (20:1 extract)	125 mg	**
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Magnesium Taurate (Elemental magnesium 8%)	150 mg	**
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