

“Dietary supplement use has increased during the past decade.

Epidemiologic studies suggest that patients turn to dietary supplements because of a reluctance to take prescription medications or a lack of satisfaction with the results.

They often perceive dietary supplements to be a safer or more natural alternative...

Familiarity with the evidence for use and the possible resulting risks can help health professionals to guide patient decisions regarding use of dietary supplements.” ()

The B vitamins are important for the nervous system. It has been suggested that they stabilise the body's lactate levels, which are thought to be involved in anxiety attacks.

Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine) is a known energizer that also exerts a calming effect.

Vitamin B-1 (thiamine) helps reduce anxiety and has a calming effect on the nerves.

Niacinamide (a form of Vitamin B-3) is important in the production of certain brain chemicals. In large doses, it has a calming effect.

The B vitamins may be taken separately or in a B Complex form.

Note: Brewer's yeast, which is a source of B vitamins, may interact with MAOIs to cause raised blood pressure.

Calcium and magnesium are important to prevent nervous tension. Calcium is a natural tranquilliser. Magnesium helps relieve anxiety, tension, nervousness, and muscular spasms.

Taken in combination before bed magnesium and calcium may improve sleep. Note that alcohol diminishes the body's magnesium, causing nervousness and irritability.

Vitamin C is necessary for proper functioning of adrenal glands and brain chemistry

Potassium is essential for proper functioning of the adrenal glands.

Low levels of selenium have been found in some people with anxiety disorder. It is a powerful antioxidant that protects the heart.

Vitamin E helps transport oxygen to brain cells and protect them from free radical damage.

Zinc has a calming effect on the central nervous system.

SAM: S-ADENOSYL METHIONINE a metabolite of the amino-acid methionine; doses of 800-1600 mg per day have been found to alleviate low mood in patients who are moderately depressed.

A British study has suggested that it may also be helpful in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which shares features with arachnoiditis.

GABA is an amino acid, but as a neurotransmitter chemical, it is inadvisable to take as a supplement, especially in conjunction with other medication that affects brain chemicals.

L-tryptophan is another brain chemical precursor and may not be advisable without medical supervision.

Similarly, 5-HTP, a precursor of serotonin, affects brain chemical balance and I do not recommend its use.

Acetylcarnitine is a relative 'newcomer' which is being suggested as a 'brain booster'.

It is thought that the acetyl- group of the acetylcarnitine is used to acetyl-CoA, which is important in energy production in cells. It is also used to make the important brain chemical acetylcholine.

Some studies suggest that perhaps acetylcarnitine can even act as a neurotransmitter itself.

This may explain some of the benefits attributed to acetylcarnitine, which include heightened mental alertness. Acetylcarnitine has been shown to prevent the development of autonomic neuropathy in rats suffering from artificially induced diabetes.

It has also been found effective in the therapy of acute and early chronic Peyronie's disease, a scarring condition. However, as with other similar compounds, one must sound a note of caution: brain chemistry is highly complex and these substances have not been tried and tested for long enough as yet to ensure they are safe in the longer term.

Co-Enzyme Q10 is a naturally occurring nutrient found in each cell of the body and is found in foods, especially in fish and meats. In addition to playing a significant role in the energy system of each cell, CoQ10 is a good antioxidant.

Many people who take CoQ10 notice that this nutrient provides energy and mental clarity. CoQ10 may help lower blood pressure and may be beneficial in heart failure.

A study in 1992 found that, alongside vitamin B6 and iron, co-Q10 minimised symptoms of dementia in patients with Alzheimer's disease and slowed progressive memory loss.

CoQ10 exists naturally in our mitochondria, the energy batteries and is essential in the production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the basic energy molecule of each cell.

Experience of Dr. Ray Sahelian, M.D. ()

"The effect from 30 mg of CoQ10 is mild, mostly consisting of a slightly higher energy level. The effects become more noticeable with 60 mg. I have taken up to 120 mg in the morning.

On this dose, I notice an increase in energy as the day goes on, with an urge to take a long walk or be physically active. There is enhanced focus, motivation, and productivity, along with the desire to talk to people. The 120-mg dose, though, is too much since I feel too energetic and alert even in late evening when I want to slow down and get ready for sleep.

I usually do not recommend my patients take more than 10 to 30 mg on a long term basis"

Lipoic acid: (alpha lipoic acid)

This is a natural antioxidant and also helps with blood sugar control and has been found helpful in diabetic neuropathy.

Lipoic acid increases the levels of glutathione, a very important antioxidant normally found in our cells which is responsible for mopping up all types of toxins and free radicals but is not helpful in supplement form.

Lipoic acid also protects other antioxidants such as vitamin C and vitamin E. Feeding lipoic acid and acetyl-L-carnitine to old rats has been found to improve performance on memory tasks and this is thought to be by lowering oxidative damage and improving mitochondrial function.

The ideal dose is not yet known, but for treatment of diabetic neuropathy, 200mg per day has been found to be beneficial.

Fish oils:

The major source of omega-3 fatty acids. (Another source is flax oil).

Fish oils have been found to be helpful in a wide range of conditions ranging from cardiovascular to joint; the 'old wives' remedy of cod liver oil for arthritis and rheumatism seems to have some rational basis after all.

Fish oils are useful in combating inflammatory diseases, including autoimmune conditions such as Rheumatoid Arthritis and, and inflammatory bowel disorders such as Crohn's.

Experts such as Dr. Robert Atkins (Dr. Atkins Via-Nutrient Solution: Nature's Answer to Drugs) suggest that fish oils are an important strategy for combating depression.

Fish oil is a more immediate source of Omega-3 fatty acids than flax oil, which can take weeks to be properly converted into the types that the body can use.

Dr. Atkins recommends taking 400iu of vitamin E alongside the fish oils to combat any degradation of the oils by peroxidation, as they are inherently unstable.

GLA Omega-6 oil:

Found in Evening Primrose oil and Borage. Dr. Atkins suggests that this acts synergistically with the fish oils and studies have shown this to be the case in some conditions.

