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SILENT SUFFERING

Many health issues are so constant we can forget they're even there. Ultimately, however, they impact upon the quality of our life and we can't feel and function at our optimum. Rest easy, there is help at hand.

Words by **Sarah Berry**

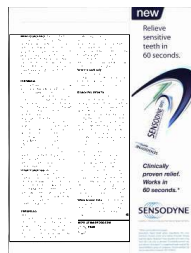
Ailments such as insomnia, digestive upsets, anxiety or tiredness are increasingly common. Many who experience these symptoms simply shut up and put up. It may be they don't realise the extent to which their mood and energy are being affected; they may have resigned themselves to a life of mild discomfort; or they may be too embarrassed to seek help. But there is no need to suffer in silence. These remedies can help soothe moderate conditions and help you gauge whether it's time to seek professional help.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is more than stress, says GP Dr Ginni Mansfield. It's often characterised by feelings you know are irrational, but don't know what to do about. "It's important to distinguish between what the feelings

are and what you can do about them. This means acknowledging that what you are feeling is okay. Trying to suppress or chastise yourself only creates guilt and low self-esteem," she explains. "By understanding you are experiencing anxiety you can start noticing what helps, and use techniques like breathing – which can be learned through yoga and meditation – to calm you down."

Another strategy is to provide support for your nervous system, says naturopath Emma Sutherland. "People with anxiety are often deficient in their neurotransmitters [receptors that help soothe adrenal overload]," she explains. "Getting fresh air and morning sunshine is great for stimulating neurotransmitters, vitamin B5 and 6 supplements help replenish the nervous system, while taking essential fatty acids, in the form of flaxseed or olive oil, soothe the neurons."



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When to seek help: If you still don't see a shift and anxiety is affecting relationships negatively or your ability to sleep well or perform well at work, it's definitely time to get professional support. "By the time most people seek help for anxiety, they have been living with it for far too long," Mansfield says. "Often, if it's gone unaddressed, people end up suffering depression as well. You absolutely shouldn't put up with it. It's debilitating and it can be helped."

INSOMNIA

Lying awake waiting for the sun to rise is the last thing we need when we're desperate for sleep, but it happens to almost everyone in times of stress. "Luckily, something as simple as exercise can help," explains Mansfield, "as you release nervous tension and give the brain time to download. Over a short period, I'd also suggest taking an antihistamine, which chemically induces sleep but, unlike a sleeping pill, isn't addictive."

Natural remedies can also encourage sleep. "Magnesium is an excellent muscle relaxant. It can be taken orally one hour before bed or topically in an Epsom salts bath," Sutherland says. "In the bath, use 500g of Epsom salts for a therapeutic effect, and a little lavender essential oil. A strong cup of chamomile tea is also calming. Use two tea bags in just 100ml of water – so you don't end up peeing in the middle of the night – cover the top of the cup to contain the essential oils and steep for three minutes."

When to seek help: When insomnia begins to compromise your daily functioning and you find yourself getting ratty, it's worth looking at other options. "A few days of not sleeping is okay, but nip it in the bud before it gets dangerous," Mansfield warns. "With chronic insomnia, the brain starts behaving like a badly trained puppy. In this instance, your GP can help by providing you with brain-training exercises."

TIREDNESS

"How to prevent tiredness really is the 10 gazillion-dollar question," Mansfield admits. "We know the top concern for 25 per cent of people visiting their GPs is tiredness. It's very common, and yet a British study showed that in 97 per cent of cases no abnormality showed up when people were tested."

While depression is a common cause, often tiredness is a result of lifestyle, says Sutherland. "Burning the candle at both ends will lead to lethargy, as will insufficient exercise. Poor nutrition is another big factor for a lot of people." To deal with tiredness she recommends cleaning up your diet, eating nutrient-rich food and taking a good B vitamin and an iron supplement.

When to seek help: If chronic tiredness is interfering with your life, a GP or naturopath can offer objective advice and test for other possible issues such as iron deficiency and an underactive thyroid.

DIGESTIVE UPSETS

"Western society is funny when it comes to talking about digestion," says Sutherland, "so people experience discomfort and think it must be normal. [But] you shouldn't feel bloated after every [meal] – it's a classic [sign] of something your body doesn't like."

Digestive upsets can be the result of a food intolerance or too much of a good thing, says Mansfield. "Constant cramping, bloating and gas can also be caused by too many cruciferous vegies – things like cauliflower and brussels sprouts – raw foods, excess salt and even too much water – more than four litres a day."

Limiting bad belly culprits is the obvious answer; however, you can also take steps to aid your digestion such as taking a probiotic, drinking peppermint tea and avoiding artificial sweeteners, says Sutherland. "It's also important to remember you should be going to the loo at least once a day, otherwise toxins start reabsorbing into the large intestine. If you're not, try taking some water-soluble fibre, such as chia seeds or slippery elm. Chia seeds are super high in protein and essential fatty acids and their slimy outer shell helps get rid of the bloating and gas."

When to seek help: If you experience digestive upsets for more than a couple of weeks see your healthcare practitioner for testing as any longstanding problems can indicate something more serious.

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