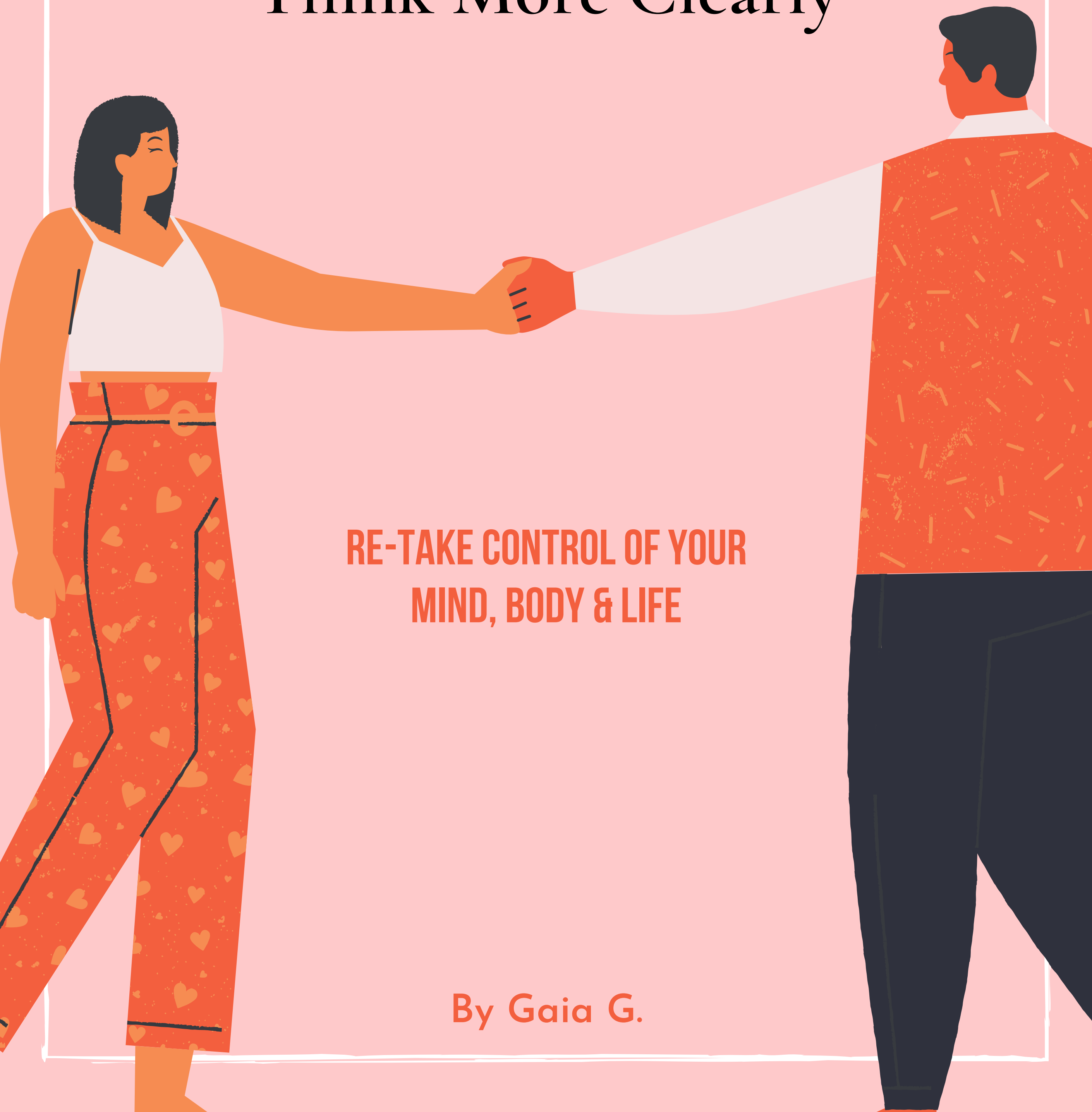


The Future Kind Series

6 Proven Ways

To Release Stress,
Overcome Anxiety &
Think More Clearly



RE-TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR
MIND, BODY & LIFE

By Gaia G.

The stress of daily life can leave us frazzled, constantly worried, unable to focus on tasks, and think clearly – even if we try our hardest to not let things get to us.

The good news is that there's likely nothing inherently wrong with you, but it's your lifestyle that needs some long-overdue tweaking to reflect exactly the lively, confident, and happy person you aspire to be.

As winter approaches, we should all take a long, hard look at our habits and how well they're serving us when it comes to stress management, mental clarity, and anxiety.

Chances are we're not dedicating enough of our time to taking good care of ourselves!

Recognizing this is the first step in taking control of your life back and experience a healthier mind and body, so without further ado, here's our recommendation for the six best ways to release stress and overcome anxiety in your daily life!



1.GET YOUR DIET IN CHECK

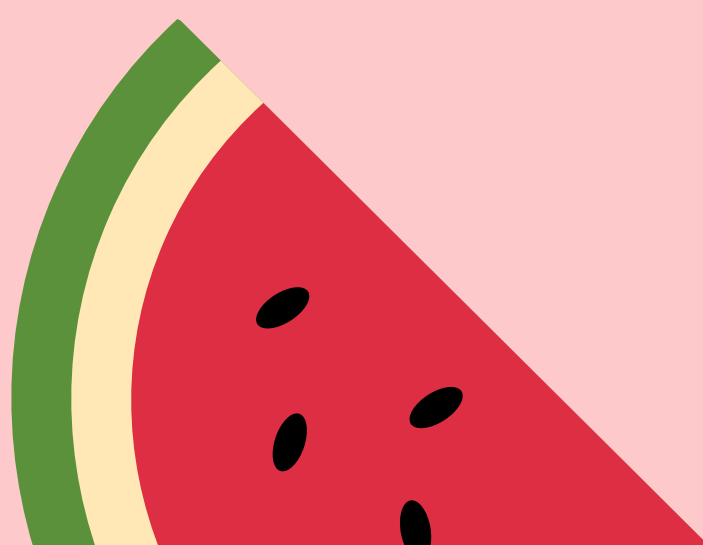
It's not ground-breaking, but it's real. Eating a balanced, health-promoting diet packed with vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes can help you ease anxiety, manage stress, and improve daily focus and concentration.

Antioxidants have been proven to play a key role in managing stress-induced psychiatric disorders like anxiety and depression (1), as administering vitamin C, vitamin A, and (to a lesser extent) vitamin E supplements to patients with sub-optimal levels has been shown to ease symptoms of anxiety and depression.

If you're eating a Standard American Diet, or simply have never given that much thought to what you're nourishing your body with on a daily basis, you are likely not consuming the amount of antioxidant-rich foods that will allow you to feel better inside and out. Try reaching out for antioxidant-packed fruit and veggies like berries, non-starchy veg, and spices (2) and observe how your mood might shift to a more energized, less anxiety-driven disposition – you don't have to be diagnosed with an anxiety or depressive disorder to experience solid change!

Antioxidants are not the end-all-be-all solution to your stress issues and lack of focus, however. Research shows that eating carbohydrates can also help us manage our mood by providing us with an impressive serotonin boost (3). But before you go ahead and start eating noodles every single day, know that diets packed with refined carbs are also associated with poor weight management, and tend to result in cravings and withdrawal symptoms resembling drug addiction (4).

The solution? Eating a diet rich in whole grains (complex carbohydrates) can help regulate blood sugar levels through slower metabolization, allowing you to achieve a calmer state of mind as well as sustained energy throughout the day (5). No insulin spikes, high blood pressure, sugar cravings, and post-lunch slumps in sight!



Fiber-rich foods have also been shown to promote serotonin production, thanks to a process referred to as the “gut-brain axis”. The microorganisms living in our gut can influence on the way we feel by activating neural pathways and the signalling systems of our central nervous system (6). To put it simply, a healthy gut is a happy mind, and nothing makes your good gut bacteria healthier than consuming fiber they can feed on and thrive on.

So, how can you achieve a stress-free lifestyle and a calmer, more focused state of mind by using food as medicine? Putting all these eye-opening studies together, it appears that eating a whole food, plant-based diet rich in antioxidants and fiber might be the best way of improving mental clarity with a natural diet.



2. ALLOW TIME FOR MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years, and its popularity certainly hasn't waned as we have moved to a less spiritual, busier way of life— in fact, it's only gotten bigger!

Don't worry, you don't have to be an aspiring spiritual guru or a crazy flexible yogi to experience the benefits of mindfulness practices and daily meditation. The efficiency of these practices has actually been studied in a scientific and controlled setting: perceived stress and anxiety have been reported to decrease as a direct result of meditation and mindfulness techniques (7).

The exact way in which our mood and cognitive function benefit from meditation is still a source of debate among experts, but it's likely to be associated with the so-called "Relaxation Response", the opposite of our body's fight or flight mode, which occurs when we find ourselves in a state of deep relaxation (8).

So, what exactly is meditation, what is mindfulness, and how can you start incorporating these practices into your daily routine?

Meditation is mostly an umbrella term encompassing a variety of practices (9) aiming to improve focus and enhance mental clarity by training the mind to ignore external stimuli and simply be still within itself. Breathwork (focusing on your breath), visualization (imagining specific images), mantra (focusing on a specific word or sentence), body scans (focusing on body parts to visualize and release emotions), and sitting quietly while observing emotions and mental images are all examples of meditation.



Mindfulness, on the other hand, refers to the daily practice of learning to pay attention to the present moment, with intention and curiosity rather than judgment and overthinking (10). It refers to the intentional exercise of observing the world with a naïve mind and observing what internal processes and thoughts words, images, and objects trigger within ourselves – from a place of complete detachment.

Getting started with meditation is easy, even if this is your first time looking into any of these practices. Start with the low-effort commitment of sitting still for five minutes, closing your eyes and observing the thoughts and images that come to your mind. To-do lists for the day, money worries, what you're going to have for dinner... observe it all without any judgement and sit with it until the worry eases its pressure and becomes just a thought, then move on to the next. You won't necessarily be able to detach yourself from worries and stress-triggering thoughts from the get-go, but as you open your eyes again, you will likely feel a sense of stillness and calmness wash over you, even if for a second.

You can try this technique in the shower, while working out, as you're having your morning coffee, or just before you go to sleep – keep training daily and see if, like many others, you start experiencing an overall healthier mindset as a result.



3. GET SWEATING!

There's a reason why so many people like heading to the gym at the end of a day that's left them feeling overwhelmed, angry, or stressed.

It's not a secret that exercise is an all-natural stress relief and mood booster that will make your mind and body healthier at the same time, so how come so many of us are getting so little of it? Unfortunately, it's when we are at our busiest and most stressed out that we forget to dedicate a good chunk of our free time to moving our body and preparing healthy meals. It's a counter-intuitive, destructive habit that requires a lot of willpower to defeat, but even just committing ourselves to five minutes of exercise a day can help us build in the habit into our hectic lives.

Exercise releases endorphins and stimulates serotonin production (11), easing stress, anxiety, and improving mental focus even in individuals suffering from diagnosed clinical anxiety disorders.

Adults are recommended to get at least 150 minutes of exercise per week (12) to maintain their overall good health, but if you are specifically looking for ways to release pent-up stress, clear your mind of the clutter, and boost your energy levels, just as little as five minutes of blood-pumping exercise can provide anti-anxiety effects (13). Chances are, you're going to want to keep doing it for longer than that too!

What kind of exercise should you add to your routine? Whatever form of exercise you truly enjoy will bring great results, as the key is simply staying consistent, no matter what life may throw at you or how busy you might get.



4. INVEST IN YOUR HEALTH WITH SUPPLEMENTS

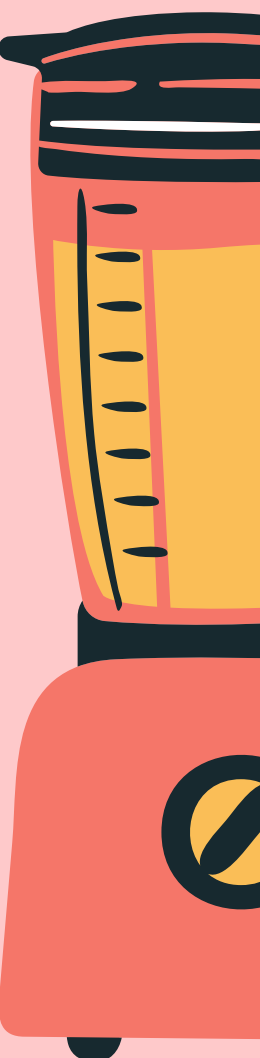
Even though you should always aim to get the majority of your essential nutrients from your diet, it might not always be easy to track exactly how much of which nutrient we're getting on the daily and plan our meals accordingly – especially when we're experiencing high levels of stress! It's now proven that investing in premium-quality supplements can help achieve better focus and manage feelings of stress and anxiety better, and that lesser-known natural herbs can also provide you with benefits that diet alone may not be able to give.

Supplementing key vitamins and minerals has been shown to reduce perceived levels of stress and anxiety (14), and several studies have suggested that magnesium, specifically, might attenuate anxiety symptoms (15), though more research is needed to confirm this claim. Recent studies have also found that individuals supplementing higher doses of omega-3 fatty acids have experienced significant reduction in anxiety symptoms(16).

It's adaptogens like ashwagandha and rhodiola, however, that are showing the most promising results when it comes to improving stress response, as they have been proven to exert an anti-fatigue effect that can help us overcome stress, increase mental work capacity, tolerate exhaustion, and enhance our mind's attention (17).

Both ashwagandha and rhodiola have been put forward as alternative natural treatments for social and generalized anxiety, as clinical trials have showed their efficacy in reducing perceived stress (18) and even in mimicking the effects of traditional mood stabilizers and antidepressants (19)! To a lesser extent, lemon balm has also been researched as an all-natural treatment for stress, and its effects have been associated with improved mood and cognitive performance (20), proving that this herb has so much more to offer than just its amazing smell.

Incorporating these three ingredients into your routine and making sure you're getting enough magnesium and omega-3s are all great ways of treating daily stress and improving mental clarity – remembering to take them is the only “work” you'll have to put into it!



5. DON'T BE AFRAID TO REACH OUT

Having a supportive network of people around you, which includes family, friends, partners, and co-workers, has been proven essential to maintain not only psychological health, but physical health too.

In fact, research has shown that the risk of death among men and women with the fewest social ties was more than twice as high as the risk for adults with the most social ties (21), a link that can be explained by the fact that the emotional support and sense of “belonging” provided by social relationships may reduce the risk of unhealthy behaviors and poor physical health.

The benefits that a supportive social network can have on mental health, however, are much easier to spot: people with limited social connectedness report poorer mental health, and building relationships with others can have a sizeable impact on preventing mental health issues like depression and anxiety (22).

You don't have to wait until you're the end of your rope before reaching out to someone you trust. Good mental health comes from looking after yourself and establishing healthy connections on the daily, so we never get to the point where the stress we have accumulated gets the best of us.

As we grow up, we tend to not put as much time and effort in cultivating healthy, long-lasting relationships with our peers, and many of us report feeling lonely and socially isolated (23) despite living in an increasingly interconnected world. Maintaining a close bond with your family members, meeting likeminded people through hobbies, and only surrounding yourself with individuals who add a positive, supportive influence into your life are some of the most important steps for achieving a healthy and fulfilling social life – and enjoy all the health benefits that come with it!



6. TRANSFORM YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT

The popularity of shows like “Tidying Up With Marie Kondo” and the increased worldwide interest in minimalist design and lifestyles suggest that we have become more attentive to the environment we live in than ever.

There’s a pretty good reason for that too: our home environment plays a crucial role in how we feel and how productive we are. According to a 2018 study, a cluttered, disorganized home can be a major source of stress that can lead to life dissatisfaction, especially for older adults (24).

A cluttered home is a cluttered mind.

Research shows that cortisol levels can be negatively affected by a messy environment, leading to chronic stress and worse sleep, while an organized, beautiful home can promote healthy cortisol slopes and have you feel relaxed and more content as a result (25). If you’re having a hard time feeling at home in your own home, start by cleaning your surroundings more frequently than you usually do, before moving on to reorganizing your furniture, adding more personal touches to your décor, and fixing or replacing anything that you’ve been procrastinating taking care of for too long.

A clean, bright space can change your outlook on at-home exercise, healthy eating, and mindful routines – your mind will feel just as clean and bright in return!



RESOURCES

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