

Nutrition and Mental Health

Anxiety and Anger: Is It Low Blood Sugar?

In the following lists, circle the symptoms that you experience.

Anxiety or Anger

Racing thoughts
Obsessive thoughts
Worrying about the future
Reliving past events
Hyper-vigilance
Avoiding certain situations
Restlessness
Angry outbursts
Irritability
Muscle tension
Difficulty sleeping
Palpitations
Sweating
Trembling
Shortness of breath
Feeling light-headed
Chills and hot flashes
Fatigue

Hypoglycemia

Mild signs
Nervousness
Trembling
Increased heart rate
Palpitations
Increased sweating
Hunger
Moderate signs
Irritability
Decreased concentration
Headache
Fatigue
Mental confusion
Severe signs
Unresponsive
Unconscious
Convulsions

Why are the symptoms of anxiety, anger, and hypoglycemia so similar?

The symptoms are similar because they are caused by the same hormones. These hormones are the fight-or-flight hormones—called adrenaline. Anger is the fight and anxiety is the flight. When adrenaline is preparing the mind and body to fight or flee, it increases heart rate, respiratory rate, blood flow to skeletal muscles, blood glucose; decreases digestion, and stimulates the amygdala, the part of the brain that prepares for a quick response, to be ready for fight or flight.

The brain's primary fuel is glucose. When your blood sugar (glucose) becomes low, your brain becomes concerned. In order to continue to function well, your brain will tell your kidneys to release adrenaline in order to increase blood glucose. Although your brain now has some fuel, the amygdala has been stimulated by adrenaline. This can cause your concerns or irritations to become amplified.



How Can I Prevent Hypoglycemia?

- Eat protein for breakfast. Some good breakfasts are: a whole boiled egg and toast, a protein shake, quinoa with walnut, or nut butter (almond or cashew) on toast.
- Eat a small snack or meal every 2 to 4 hours.
- Eat something with protein or that is low in sugar, such as nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts), nut butter, or hummus with apples or carrots for snacks.
- Decrease the portion sizes of foods that your body recognizes as sugars (sweets, breads, pastas, white rice, white potatoes).
- Have foods with fiber in them at every meal. Vegetables, seed grains (quinoa, brown rice, bulgur, millet), beans, nuts, and fruit are all great examples.
- Limit your alcohol intake to no more than 1 serving per day.
- Find ways to be physically active each day.
- Try to only eat sweets soon after eating foods that have fiber in them. This will slow the absorption of sugar into your blood stream.
- Take a multivitamin once a day. This will provide you with some nutrients that help control blood

How do I know if hypoglycemia is contributing to my anxiety or anger?

Be curious. Try keeping a daily log for a few days so you can see the patterns.

Time	Food	Drink	Activities	Emotions

Some questions that suggest hypoglycemia

- Does the anxiety or anger occur 2 to 4 hours after eating?
- Does food help decrease the anxiety or anger?
- Did your breakfast lack protein?
- Do you eat a lot of sweets, breads, and pastas?

Some questions that suggest an emotional component

- Is there a current situation or person whom you are anxious about or irritated with even right after a meal?
- Do you worry or become irritated about events that occurred in the past or will happen in the future?

Who can help me with anxiety, anger and hypoglycemia?

- **A naturopathic doctor** can help you identify and treat the physical causes of hypoglycemia. Although prevention of hypoglycemia is often about changing what and when you eat, there can also be other causes such as adrenal exhaustion, food allergies, high blood pressure, and weight gain.
- **An acupuncturist** often approaches anxiety, anger, and hypoglycemia symptoms differently than most Western doctors. Acupuncture can adjust qi in you body to decrease the symptoms. Additionally, the Chinese have developed herbal formulas that help with these conditions.
- **A counselor or therapist** can help you examine the emotional causes of anxiety and anger. Often, talking to a trained professional will help you with the situation and decrease your anxiety and anger. The decrease in the anxiety and anger can decrease the symptoms.