FIGHTING STRESS AND ANXIETY

For some, gift shopping and family dinners during the holidays can be stressful and anxiety-inducing. For others, anxiety is a year-round battle. Here, we look at some of the medications that can provide respite.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

[Diagram of hypothalamus and hormone release]

HYPOTHALAMUS

CORTICOTROPIN-RELEASING HORMONE (CRH)

CORTICOTROPIN RELEASE

CORTISOL PRODUCTION INCREASED

HOW ARE STRESS AND ANXIETY TREATED?

There is technically no such thing as a stress medication. But because stress and anxiety share characteristics, psychiatrists treat stress with anxiety medications. Two key medications are examined below.

BENZODIAZEPINES

XANAX

Benzodiazepines can be used in short-term management of anxiety disorders. They amplify the effects of γ-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which produces a calming effect by reducing communication between neurons.

GABA

Although these drugs manage short-term anxiety effectively, they are not effective in providing long-term improvement and are usually prescribed only for a few weeks. Side effects include drowsiness and dependency.

SEROTONIN

SEROZPON

Antidepressants such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) can also treat anxiety. They block reabsorption of the chemical serotonin in the brain, increasing levels of the mood-regulating compound.

Patients must take SSRIs for several weeks before experiencing any benefits, but can stay on SSRIs for longer than benzodiazepines. SSRIs also have fewer side effects, although pregnant or breastfeeding women should not take them.

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