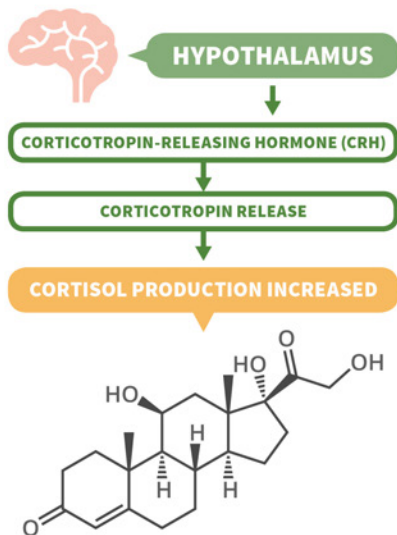


FIGHTING STRESS AND ANXIETY

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?

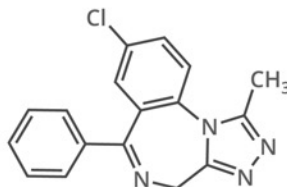


The physical experience of stress or anxiety can have multiple causes in the body. Signals from the hypothalamus in the brain can trigger production of cortisol (the so-called stress hormone), as well as an increase in adrenaline and noradrenaline levels. The effects of the stress response include increased heart rate and blood pressure, immune system suppression, and decreased libido. Anxiety can develop because of problems with regulation of these circuits in the brain.

HOW ARE STRESS AND ANXIETY TREATED?

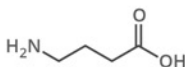
There is technically no such thing as a stress medication. But because stress and anxiety share characteristics, psychiatrists treat stress with anxiety medications. Two key medications are examined below.

BENZODIAZEPINES



XANAX

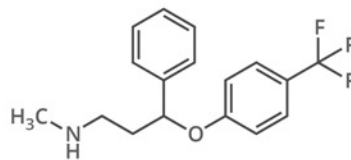
Benzodiazepines can be used in short-term management of anxiety disorders. They amplify the effects of γ -aminobutyric acid (GABA), which produces a calming effect by reducing communication between neurons.



GABA

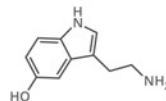
Although these drugs manage short-term anxiety effectively, they are not effective in providing long-term improvement and are usually prescribed only for a few weeks. Side effects include drowsiness and dependency.

ANTI-DEPRESSANTS



PROZAC

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.



SEROTONIN

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 breast-feeding women should not take them.