

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 153: ANXIETY + DEPRESSION: WHAT WORKS, A YEAR LATER

About a year ago, I realized: This isn't normal. I want to get better. I'm going to have to face this head on.

I realized I had been living with anxiety, panic attacks and depression... for pretty much forever. A year ago I made that realization and last September, I talked about it with you in [episode 123](#). Since then I've gotten so many emails, comments and conversations about your own struggles and the question: So what do you DO?

Today I'd like to share what I've found works for me.

Usually we talk about an issue in your creative business, but today I'm going to answer the question I get asked all of the time: WHAT WORKS?

Before we get started, disclaimers!

You know how I'm always saying that people vary, and what works for one business might not work for yours? That is a scientific fact when it comes to health. What works for me may not work for you.

And beyond that, I'm not a doctor. Mental health is a HEALTH issue, so please please please go to a doctor and deal with this.

When I spoke about this on a panel at MWCC, a girl cried with me about how afraid she was to go to the doctor. Afraid they'd put her on medicine that would numb her out.

Here's what I told her: You can say no. You can tell them exactly what you're willing to do. It's your body and your decision. And yet, your doctor has options other than medicine: they can recommend a therapist, they can recommend a support group.

What matters more than anything is that you TELL SOMEONE. And that you proactively seek help, instead of hiding it.

And one last disclaimer/confession: I hate talking about this. Just ask my husband, I HATE talking about my feelings. (Although I love to make other people talk about theirs!) But I'm talking about it because I want you to know you're not alone. I want you to know it's okay to be exactly where you are. And I want you to know you have options, so KEEP EXPERIMENTING. KEEP TRYING THINGS.

That's what we're going to talk about today: Things to try. People vary, so don't be discouraged if you've tried all this and you hated it. Try something else. Try again. keep going.

First, we have to talk about medicine.
(I'm not a doctor.)

Because this is the fear a lot of people have about the doctor, I'm gonna be honest with you about my experience. I think a lot of this was scary for me, because I had no idea what to expect.

I told Jess I wasn't sure if I should talk about my experience and she said, "I so get that, but this is part of why there's a stigma, and there shouldn't be. If you had a heart condition you'd take medication if that was what would fix the condition and make your body function the way it should. Mental illness can often be improved with medication - it's something in your body that isn't working as well as it should, and the medicine makes it work better. Of course everyone has the right to refuse treatment for any condition, but the people who are all Negative Nancy about meds aren't being at all logical about this. They would never deny someone with a heart condition the right to take medicine for that."

I told the doctor I didn't want to go on benzodiazepines, because I hope to get pregnant and would be anxious (ha!) about the effects of these drugs on a baby.

They were very open to trying safer drugs and I tried three different medications (consecutively) and here are the results:

- ★ The first one had the opposite impact from what we were going for, and I was in a deep depression for 2 weeks until I realized: Oh, it's the medicine!
- ★ The second one didn't seem to have any impact.
- ★ The third one helped me sleep better than I ever had and I certainly felt calmer... but I gained 20 pounds in 6 weeks. Which is another whole thing to be depressed about. (That was an unfunny joke)

So I'm not on any medications right now, but I may be the next time I see you. I just don't know. I DO know that I'm a huge fan of the potential. I have a friend who has managed her bipolar for years, with medication, and she truly couldn't have the life and relationships she has, without it. So I'm a fan. But again, it's going to be an exploration.

Next up, Therapy.

Ok, so I found a therapist I really love, but I avoid going because I know I'm going to cry and then have to deal with my crap all day. That's not what I advise, but I've heard the same thing from many of you. So when you're feeling bad, schedule an appointment.

Speaking of therapy, I read a LOT about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Research has found it so effective, that Britain's NHS spent money to train more therapists in it.

The premise of it is this: Your thoughts impact your physical feelings, which impact your actions. And we have a LOT of automatic thoughts, assumptions we make about reality and the world that just aren't true.

(An example from last week's episode: Knitwear designers don't make money. A more traditional anxiety example: OMG, I'm late. She'll hate me.)

Those thoughts then lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, whatever. So in CBT, you notice the feelings, how they feel in your body, then try to trace it back to the thought, then ask: Is this helpful? Am I defaulting into a cognitive distortion (like mind-reading or assuming I know how she'll feel)?

I actually talked more about reframing cognitive distortions in [Episode 115](#)

There's a list of [cognitive distortions](#) in the show notes at TaraSwiger.com/podcast153.

This brings us to our first tool that I actually regularly use: [MoodNotes](#).

It teaches you CBT and reminds you to practice it at least once a day. It asks you to pick your happy/sad face, choose your emotions and then, if you're feeling negatively, look into the thought and see if you're using cognitive distortions.

There's a book that teaches CBT and it's very thorough: [The Feeling Good Handbook](#).

Next tool I actually use: Meditation

Another method that is heavily researched and I've found useful is meditation. Now, bear with me! It isn't spiritual or woo-woo at all. In fact, if you're an atheist and meditation just seems unbelievable, check out Dan Harris's book, [10% Happier](#). He's a newscaster and skeptic and in it he shares his story.

Now I feel weird calling it meditation, so I just call it Quiet Time.

There is so much science backing up the fact that sitting quietly for at least 10 minutes a day, without clinging to a thought, rewires your brain and helps you deal with adversity, stress, and anxiety. I think a lot of people think they can't do it, because they think the goal is to make their brain blank. No way - that's never going to happen. Instead, you just don't CLING to the thought. I mentally visualize it floating away. Next one comes up, it floats away. Now that's the goal, but of course you get sucked into a thought and then you're thinking about something and then you say, Oh! I'm thinking about this, let it go. THAT is meditation. Noticing when your thoughts suck you into their flow, then stepping out of the flow.

The best app I've found and one so many of my students love is [HeadSpace](#). There's a free 10 day challenge, to get you used to meditation, and dozens of my students have used it to successfully start this habit.

Now the thing that I wish didn't work, but really does: Exercise.

Of everything I'm going to talk about this episode, this is the only thing I find 100% effective in ensuring my anxiety + depression stay in check for the next 24-48 hours. Of course, if I wake up too exhausted to get out of bed, I'm pretty much screwed, as I can't force myself to do it.

But it works.

Here's what I mean by exercise, in order of the activation energy it requires:

- ★ Walking my dogs a little longer, around the block
- ★ Going on a longer walk (coffee shop and Walgreens with RedBox, both within walking distance)
- ★ Going on a run or to the gym to lift very heavy weights

If I can just do #1 on a really low day, I feel a bit better. If I wake up and immediately put on my workout clothes before I can even think about it and leave the house on a run or to the gym, I'm guaranteed a day where I'm high functioning.

I listed these activities specifically, because it's not JUST about sweating, for me. They all have a built-in other effects: Walking and running outside get me in the sunshine, seeing the flowers, grass, clouds, things that remind me that there is a bigger world than in my head. I specifically look for systems working together without human interference (the tree flowered and grew leaves, without me even doing anything!)

Weight lifting's benefit (on top of the endorphins from sweating) is that, when done for just a few weeks in a row, I feel stronger. My back/shoulders are straighter and less slumpy. And that strength is both physical (I can lift heavy groceries!) and mental (I'm strong enough to handle this!).

Essential Oils

When I first posted about my anxiety/depression coming-out story in the Starship, the one remedy that was recommended more than any other seemed kinda crazy: Essential Oils. I was like, what? The smelly stuff?

My mom had recently gotten into essential oils so she was telling me about it all the time. She gave me a diffuser and some lavender, lemon and eucalyptus and sent me home with it. It seemed crazy, but there's an increasing amount of studies that back it up.

A few oils, like lavender and bergamot (orange), have been very well researched, especially for reducing work-related stress, anxiety among people with mild depression, and even pain relief.

The reason why these oils work at changing or regulating mood and focus is that olfaction (sense of smell) is directly connected to the limbic system, which is the area in our brain that manages memory, mood, and focus. It's where we process emotions and act with flight or flight. In other words, it's where anxiety hangs out.

How my clients recommended it was lavender rubbed on the feet before I sleep, or lavender and orange diffused in a diffuser. Or in my bath, which is another thing that works great: a super hot bath with epsom salts, bubbles, and lavender oil.

And I'm here to tell you, it works. It doesn't CHANGE my mood as much as it gives me a minute to acknowledge what I feel and choose a different mood. It's almost like bringing meditation (noticing thoughts and deciding not to be sucked in) into any moment. When I stop and think: What oil would help? Or, Oh, I'll put on some lavender, or put Peppermint on my headache, or I'll fill the diffuser with orange...that right there is a moment of disengaging with my mood or my thoughts and asking: What would help?

My favorite is the mood-elevating orange/peppermint/vanilla blend, Motivate, by doTERRA.

I've gotten super into it and done so much research, especially after a friend asked me to start working with doTERRA sellers. When I was just starting to look into it, especially as a biz model, I found it hard to find this info and I've gotten a lot of questions from you... so I'm going to explain this in more detail in a webinar on Friday. We'll talk all about how essential oils work, how to use them, and my favorites.

To attend the workshop, sign up at TaraSwiger.com/EO

Oh, and if you are listening later in the future, you can still head to that page and find the recording and info.

That's what I'm using to manage my anxiety right now: CBT, meditation, exercise, essential oils. I'll be honest, as I was putting this episode together, I was a little annoyed. This is what everyone said WOULD help. This is what the research says will help. I wanted to find something special or extraordinary. Look at this brand new thing! But...that's not how it turned out. Hopefully my specific recommendations of apps and books have helped you, or maybe this episode is the push you need to rub on some lavender or go for a long walk. :)

When you don't know what to do and everything I said seems overwhelming or impossible, here's a short list of power-ups:

- ★ Drink a whole glass of water
- ★ Go walk in the sunshine
- ★ Get dressed
- ★ Brush your hair
- ★ Listen to your favorite song
- ★ Eat something with protein (I like [these](#), they're like candy bars + protein)
- ★ Sniff some lavender or orange essential oil
- ★ Pet your pet
- ★ Give yourself permission to take care of yourself, even if that means listening to podcasts or reading and not working. It's going to be okay.

I'm wishing you an enthusiastic week.

RESOURCES:

Learn more about using Essential Oils in my webinar! Sign up [here](#)!

Articles:

[Explaining Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#)

[Cognitive Distortions](#)

[Lavender oil in hospitalized sleep study](#)

[And another Lavender and sleep study](#)

[Essential oil for stress](#)

Books:

[The Body Keeps the Score](#) - This is a book about trauma and mood disorders. If it's possible your anxiety/depression is related to trauma (recent or childhood), I can't recommend this book enough.

[10% Happier](#)

[The Feeling Good Handbook](#)

Apps:

[MoodNotes](#)

[HeadSpace](#)