

Slow Down Your Mind

Nutrition and Lifestyle
for a Calmer Brain

Débora F
Yamashita

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May this material be a space for reconnection with what is most essential: yourself.

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Chapter 1 – The Anxious Brain

Anxiety is a natural response of the body to something we perceive as a threat. It's like the brain presses an internal alert button to protect us. But when that button gets stuck in the "on" position, even when there's no real danger, we start to live in a constant state of tension — and that's exhausting.

■ How does the brain react to anxiety?

At the center of everything is the amygdala, a small but very powerful brain structure. It is responsible for identifying danger and activating the "fight or flight" mode. When hyperactive, it sends alarm signals all the time, even when there is no threat.

The prefrontal cortex — the rational part of the brain — helps interpret what's happening and says "it's okay." When we live under stress, it weakens, and the amygdala gains more control over our reactions.

■ The impact of anxiety on the body:

- Increases cortisol production (the stress hormone) - Disrupts restorative sleep - Promotes silent inflammation - Affects gut function - Impairs clear decision-making

■ The good news:

Our brain has something amazing called neuroplasticity. This means it can learn new pathways, create new connections, and reorganize itself — even after years of operating in "anxious mode."

Through conscious breathing, daily movement, proper nutrition, and mindful pauses, you can start teaching your brain that it's safe to slow down.

Chapter 2 – Calming Nutrition

Have you ever noticed how what we eat can change our mood? Sometimes a light, nourishing meal makes us feel calmer. Other times, when we overdo sugar or coffee, we end up feeling agitated, irritable, or anxious without realizing it. That's because the brain and gut are connected — and food is a direct bridge between them.

■ What does the anxious brain need?

- Stable blood sugar - Less inflammation - Nutrients to produce neurotransmitters (serotonin, GABA, dopamine) - A healthy gut, with active and protected good bacteria

■ Foods that help calm the mind:

1. Healthy fats: Olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds, fatty fish (salmon, sardines, tuna) → Nourish the brain and reduce silent inflammation
2. Fiber and prebiotics: Oats, green banana, onion, garlic, flaxseed → Feed the good bacteria in the gut and balance the gut-brain axis
3. Natural probiotics: Natural yogurt, kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut, kimchi, fermented vegetables → Restore gut flora and reduce symptoms like anxiety, cravings, and inflammation
4. Natural soothers: Chamomile tea, lemon balm tea, lavender tea → Relax the nervous system and aid sleep
5. Calming minerals: Magnesium (dark leafy greens, pumpkin seeds, pure cacao), Zinc (nuts, seeds, whole grains) → Relax muscles, support sleep regulation, and reduce cortisol

■ Foods that can increase anxiety:

- Refined sugar (sweets, cakes, sugary drinks) - Excess caffeine (coffee, black tea, energy drinks) - Ultra-processed foods (chips, stuffed cookies, deli meats) - Alcohol - Artificial additives and MSG

These foods promote inflammation, spike blood sugar, and disrupt neurotransmitters, encouraging anxiety, irritation, and food cravings.

■ How to build a calming plate?

- Half plate: colorful vegetables (raw/cooked, leafy greens) - 1/4 plate: lean proteins (eggs, chicken, fish) or legumes (chickpeas, lentils) - 1/4 plate: complex carbs (quinoa, brown rice, sweet potato) - 1 tbsp of healthy fat (olive oil, tahini, avocado, seeds)

→ Whenever possible, include a fermented food!

Chapter 3 – Movement and Breathing

Our body was made to move. But when we live with anxiety, we often become physically and emotionally stuck. Movement has the power to reorganize our thoughts, improve our mood, and quiet mental noise.

Breathing is also a bridge between the body and the mind. Conscious breathing acts like an “off switch” for the internal alarm system.

■■■ Benefits of regular movement: - Lowers cortisol (stress hormone) - Stimulates serotonin and dopamine (well-being neurotransmitters) - Improves sleep - Reduces chronic inflammation - Reorganizes neural connections in the prefrontal cortex (mental clarity, emotional control)

■ Types of movement that help the anxious brain: 1. Outdoor walking (20 to 30 min): simple, accessible, reduces amygdala hyperactivity and increases focus. 2. Gentle stretching/mobility: releases muscle tension and relaxes fascia, freeing stored emotions. 3. Yoga or Pilates: integrates body, breath, and mind, reduces mental overactivity. 4. Bodyweight exercises: planks, squats, light jumps — boost endorphins and balance the HPA axis. 5. Free dance: unlocks emotional blocks and awakens joy and creativity.

■ The importance of conscious breathing: Short, shallow breathing activates the sympathetic system (alert mode). Slow, deep belly breathing activates the parasympathetic system (relax mode).

■ Simple daily breathing techniques: - Diaphragmatic breathing: inhale through the nose (4s), feel belly rise. Exhale through mouth (6s). Repeat for 2–3 minutes. - 4-7-8 technique: inhale 4s, hold 7s, exhale 8s. Great for anxiety relief and sleep. - Box breathing: inhale 4s, hold 4s, exhale 4s, pause 4s. Ideal before meetings, tests, or stress.

Chapter 4 – Restorative Sleep

An anxious brain rarely sleeps well. It stays alert, revisiting the past or anticipating the future. But without quality sleep, the body can't recover, the gut can't heal, and mood becomes unstable.

■ What happens when we sleep poorly? - Increased cortisol (stress) - Reduced melatonin and serotonin - More brain inflammation - Disrupted gut microbiome - Hormonal imbalance (ghrelin and leptin) - Greater risk of anxiety, cravings, depression

■ Practical strategies for better sleep: 1. Maintain regular sleep/wake times (even on weekends). 2. Avoid screens 1–2h before bed — blue light blocks melatonin. 3. Eat a light dinner at least 3h before bed — digestion interferes with deep sleep. 4. Create a bedtime ritual: warm bath, chamomile tea, light reading, deep breathing, aromatherapy. 5. Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m. — its effects can linger for 8 hours. 6. Write down worries — offloading thoughts eases mental burden.

■ Nutrients that support sleep: - Tryptophan: banana, chickpeas, eggs, Brazil nuts - Magnesium: leafy greens, pumpkin seeds, cacao - Vitamin B6: avocado, tuna, chicken, banana - Herbal teas: chamomile, valerian, fennel, passionflower - Natural melatonin: cherries, grapes, walnuts

■ Practical tip: Create a nighttime mode — lower lights and sounds, avoid late discussions. Let your brain know it's safe to rest.

Chapter 5 – Mental and Digital Detox

The anxious mind lives in alert mode. And nothing feeds that more than excessive stimulation — notifications, messages, infinite feeds, comparisons, noise. The digital world, while useful, has become a major silent anxiety trigger.

Detoxing your mind and digital space doesn't mean disappearing — it means reconnecting with yourself by giving your brain a break.

■ How overstimulation affects the brain: - Reduces attention span - Increases cortisol - Fuels comparison and self-criticism - Disrupts dopamine (reward system) - Prevents mental rest - Raises insomnia, irritability, and compulsions

■ Strategies to detox mind and tech: 1. Turn off non-urgent notifications — only keep alarms and key messages. 2. Set fixed times to check emails/social media — avoid compulsive checking. 3. Have screen-free moments — at meals, before bed, after waking. 4. Practice daily silence (even for 5 minutes) — breathe, observe, reset. 5. Limit content intake — your brain can't process 300 videos/hour. Curate mindfully. 6. Don't start/end the day on social media — it puts your brain in alert mode.

■ Simple ways to restore inner calm: - Guided meditation (5 min is enough) - Enjoyable reading - Nature contact (plants, sky, wind or water sounds) - Mindful warm shower - Slow breathing with eyes closed

You don't need to live offline. Just learn to use tech in your favor — without losing yourself.

Chapter 6 – Evidence-Based Supplements

First and foremost: no supplement replaces a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle. However, in some cases, certain nutrients can support emotional balance and help modulate anxiety — especially when there are nutritional deficiencies or high levels of chronic stress.

Here are some of the most studied:

- 1. Magnesium (glycinate or threonate): - Relaxes the nervous system and muscles - Reduces tension, irritability, and insomnia - Supports GABA production (a calming neurotransmitter) → Glycinate form is more relaxing, threonate has stronger brain effects
- 2. L-theanine: - An amino acid from green tea - Stimulates alpha brain waves (calm-alert state) - Reduces anxiety without drowsiness → Great for daytime stress
- 3. Probiotics: - Good bacteria that act on the gut-brain axis - Effective strains for anxiety: - Lactobacillus rhamnosus - Bifidobacterium longum - Lactobacillus helveticus → Improve mood, sleep, and mental clarity
- 4. 5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan): - Serotonin precursor - Can support mood, reduce cravings and improve sleep → Use with professional guidance, especially if on antidepressants
- 5. GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid): - Natural inhibitory neurotransmitter (brain's “brake”) - Supplements may support relaxation in mild anxiety → Liposomal or blended forms absorb better
- 6. Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera): - Adaptogenic herb from Ayurvedic medicine - Lowers cortisol, supports chronic stress and anxiety → Use with care, especially in people with hypothyroidism
- Important reminders: - Always consult a qualified health professional before starting any supplement - Avoid combining multiple products without guidance - Choose reputable brands with transparent labels - Natural does not mean risk-free — side effects and interactions exist

Functional nutrition sees supplements as bridges, not crutches. The foundation of balance is in daily choices.

Chapter 7 – Daily Plan for a Peaceful Brain

Anxiety doesn't go away with one big change, but with small repeated steps. Building a routine with supportive foods, mindful breaks, movement, and quality sleep is like gently teaching your brain that it's safe to relax.

Here's a simple daily plan inspired by functional nutrition and the PAM program – Thought, Food, Movement:

■ **MORNING** (wake up the body and calm the mind): - Wake up at the same time every day - Avoid phone for first 20 minutes - Drink a glass of water with lemon or plain - Breathe or stretch for 5 minutes - Breakfast with: - Light protein (eggs, yogurt, chia) - Low-glycemic carb (green banana, oats) - Healthy fat (ghee, tahini, avocado)

■ **AFTERNOON** (maintain focus and stable energy): - Lunch with veggies + protein + healthy fat - Walk outside for 15 minutes - Have a calming tea (fennel, lavender, chamomile) - Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m. - Take a 10-min screen break and practice quiet

■ **EVENING** (prepare the body for rest): - Light dinner with easy-to-digest foods (soups, veggies, grains) - Turn off screens 1 hour before bed - Take a warm bath or foot soak - Deep breathing for 3 to 5 minutes - Calming tea (chamomile, passionflower, valerian) - Gratitude practice: write down 3 good things from your day

■ **WEEKLY** habits: - 2–3 nights with overnight fast (at least 3h between dinner and sleep) - 1 day digital fast (disconnect for a few hours) - Cook your meals with calm and presence - Do one enjoyable thing with no pressure: read, listen to music, cook, dance

Your brain changes based on what you repeat. Consistency with kindness is more powerful than perfection with rigidity.

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And to all who believe that slowing down is indeed a path to move forward with more health and meaning.

About the Author

Débora Yamashita is a Brazilian-trained nutritionist with broad experience in functional clinical nutrition, mental health, chronic diseases, and sustainable weight loss.

She has worked in hospitals, clinics, and educational food programs — always combining science and sensitivity.

She is the creator of the PAM Program – Thought, Food, Movement – and is passionate about teaching practical strategies that transform daily life and restore physical and emotional balance.

Currently living in the United States, she continues her mission to promote integral health through conscious nutrition and body reconnection.

Instagram: @nutrideborayamashita Email: dehyamashita@hotmail.com

References

This content was based on clinical experience, scientific publications, and updated knowledge in functional nutrition and integrative health. For a full list of sources, please contact the author at dehyamashita@hotmail.com.