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Herb Doc

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Need Brakes for Your Brain?

The neurotransmitter GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) can benefit anxiety, depression, insomnia, or nervous system disorders. GABA inhibits nerve cell communications to reduce excessive stimulation and is often called the “braking system” for the brain. Although some turn to drug therapy, generating healthy GABA naturally through diet, meditation, and exercise is possible.

GABA benefits many aspects of the body: gastrointestinal, hormone, immune, endocrine, nervous, and muscular systems. The Journal of Clinical Neurology found in 2018 that 300 milligrams of GABA supplementation improved sleep for participants in a clinical trial.

Many drugs act on GABA

receptors. These include benzodiazepines (Valium, Xanax), gabapentin (Neurontin, Gralise, Horizant), and zolpidem (Ambien, Edluar). When taken regularly, these drugs modify the brain to accommodate a higher-than-normal amount of GABA. The drugs become addictive and do not resolve underlying issues. Attempting to quit these drugs can lead to many complications, and quitting cold turkey is often not advised.

Yet research regarding how and if GABA supplements can cross the blood-brain barrier (the highly selective membrane surrounding the brain) is inconclusive. What is known is that the bacteria strains *lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* produce GABA in the gut. This gut-produced GABA enters the “enteric nervous system,” also referred to as the second brain. The second brain is a gastrointestinal tract neuron system connecting with the spinal cord. GABA developed in the gut moves into the cerebrospinal fluid, which flows throughout the spinal column into the brain. Fostering a healthy intestine and consuming glutamine-rich foods,

a GABA precursor, may increase bioavailable GABA.

Glutamine provides the material necessary to create GABA, so seek foods with glutamine for GABA synthesis. Glutamine is in fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, tempeh, sprouted rice, and green, black, white, and oolong teas. Almonds, halibut, and whole grains carry about 8 grams of glutamic acid per 8 ounces. Walnuts have a bit less, with about 5 grams of glutamine per 8 ounces, and other foods such as broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, green peas, tomatoes, potatoes, berries, bananas, oranges, and cocoa carry negligible but reliable amounts of glutamate along with micronutrients and vitamins.

Consuming foods with vitamin B6, zinc, and magnesium helps synthesize GABA, increasing what we absorb and create naturally.

As we age, GABA tends to decline. However, the evidence does not support a rationale for taking a drug that acts on GABA receptors. The National Institutes of Health says, “Benzodiazepines can impair cognition, mobility, and driving skills in older

people, as well as increase the risk of falls. A recent study also found an association between benzodiazepine use in older people and increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease.”

Supplementation with GABA is an option, but seek wise counsel. GABA supplements should never combine with alcohol, and there are contraindications with other drugs. The best possible way to work on increasing GABA is through diet, exercise, and meditation, which significantly increase GABA concentrations and overall well-being without dangerous side effects. Abundant Blessings! Shellie Rosen, Ph.D., Dipl. O.M. (NCCAOM)®, DOM, L.Ac.



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Raymond G. Sanchez Senior Center
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 9800 4th St. NW, Albuquerque

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 505-314-0049
 3910 Isleta Blvd. SW, Albuquerque

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 2008 Larrazolo SW, Albuquerque
 M-F, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Whispering Pines Senior Center
 505-281-8003
 #6 Lark Rd., Tijeras
 M-F, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 (20 miles South on South 14, Right on Canary, Left on Lark Rd.)

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