

# **A list of variables to rule out**

Anxiety is an embodied experience, and many physiological variables can contribute to your inner experience that have nothing to do with your relationship. In my years of experiencing relationship anxiety, I was quick to blame my partner for the inner experience (and my thoughts attempting to make sense of them) I was having due to my lack of self-care.

Your body (which includes your brain) is like a delicate garden that you must cultivate and nurture. If you were an expert botanist, and one of your plants was dying (let's act like the plant is your relationship), you would not blame the plant. You'd look at its environment-- the sun, the amount/quality of water and air, the altitude, the soil, the seed quality, and the unique makeup of the plant. You wouldn't expect a tomato seed to respond well to the environment of a cactus. In the same way, you must make sure that your "soil" (the context you and your relationship sit inside) is properly set up for you to thrive-- and what works for someone else might not work for you!

Remember that everything in this program is a recommendation. If you're not sure about something, try it and see how you feel. Over time, you will develop what my health coach training called **"bio-individuality,"** which essentially suggests that *"one person's medicine is another person's poison."* That goes for food, home environment, choice of partner or marriage, supplements, hobbies, exercise, career, and even what media you consume.

While of course our relationship can trigger anxiety, so can a bunch of other things. Let's make sure that the rest of your life context isn't needlessly adding to it. Much of what we humans worry about is often out of our control... and yet, there is still so much we *do* have control over (like how we show up in the world and what we consume)!

## **Variables, cont.**

- **Water.** Are you getting enough water? Studies have shown that just being a half liter dehydrated can increase your stress hormone: cortisol, which is what floods your body when you're anxious! Most people need roughly half their weight in ounces. That means if you're 160 pounds, you'll need about 80 oz of water daily, and more if you exercise. Being adequately hydrated will also promote detoxification and help prevent stagnation in the body.
- **Sugar.** Sugar can wreak havoc on your nervous system, simply due to the fact that consuming it regularly (especially refined, processed, white sugars) will result in insulin spikes trying to compensate for the flush of sugar in the body in order to metabolize it. Unfortunately, this also results in a sugar crash, which prompts us to crave more sugar and spikes our adrenaline -- the "fight or flight" hormone (not a great situation for those trying to get rid of anxiety). The sugar yo-yo results in fatigue on your adrenals over time, which will also have a negative affect on hormonal regulation.
- **Protein.** I don't enjoy most forms of protein, so this was tough for me for a long time. It is a daily, intentional effort for me to hit my protein numbers! I initially thought that protein was only for maintaining and growing my hair, nails, and facilitating muscle repair, but it's also really important for maintaining your blood sugar, and supporting the liver which detoxifies excess hormones like estrogen and cortisol. Without adequate protein, you will likely crave excess simple carbohydrates and sugars, which succumbing to will create a roller coaster of physical and emotional highs and lows. No fun!

# Variables, cont.

- **Protein, cont.** How much protein your body needs daily depends on your lean body mass. It is recommended to get 2g of protein per 1kg of lean body mass, or 1g of protein per 1lb of lean body mass. Here's how you calculate it:
  - a. Weigh yourself first thing in the morning before eating or drinking.
  - b. Determine your body fat percentage by comparing your current body composition to the images on this page.
  - c. Now reduce your weight by your body fat to get your lean body weight.
    - i. ex: If you weigh 140 lbs and your body fat is 20%, your body fat is  $140 \times .2 = 28$  lbs.  $140 - 28 = 112$  lbs. That's your lean body weight.
    - ii. To figure out your daily protein requirement:  $112 \text{ lbs} \times 1 \text{g protein} = \mathbf{112g}$ .



## **Variables, cont.**

- **Electronics.** Research shows that radiation from wireless technology affects the autonomic nervous system and increases anxiety and stress. If you're in a busy city, there might be little that you can do, but minimize keeping your phone near your body, and if possible, turn off your WiFi at night. Not to mention... the bombardment of messaging and information online is way more than a healthy human nervous system is equipped to handle. We were never meant to know all the news, everywhere in the world, all the time, and to hear all the opinions. Our bodies and nervous systems are protesting, and I recommend a detox from unnecessary exposure.
- **Magnesium.** According to the WHO, 75% of Americans aren't getting enough magnesium, which is sad because it is a critical mineral for your muscles and nerves to work correctly. It also helps you relax and sleep.
- **A relationship with the sun, moon and earth.** Studies have shown that a vitamin D deficiency may increase anxiety. Valid science aside, we get vitamin D from the sun-- but I believe reducing the sun to a mere source of vitamin D does it a disservice. I wear sunscreen in the blazing afternoon and wear hats, but nothing grounds me like putting my bare feet in the soil, closing my eyes, and beaming my face up at the sun, especially in the early morning before the rays get too intense. Putting your bare feet in the earth is called "grounding," and it neutralizes free radicals responsible for inflammation. We can't feel anxious when we feel connected to the flow of life-- and that includes our place with the planets. The moon also affects our emotions (just like the moon can fluctuate the tides of the earth, so it can do the same with our inner "tides" -- after all, we are 70% water!), so it's worth making that connection. If you are a woman with a womb, it is important to be in touch with your menstrual cycles (28 days, just like the moon!) and structuring your life around them. I really like the book, *Womancode*, by Alisa Vitti. If you no longer experience menstrual cycles, orient with the cycles of the moon.

## **Variables, cont.**

- **Fulfilling exercise.** Nourishing movement is a huge part of this program, and so it is in life! It's so important that my husband and I included "fulfilling exercise" for ourselves as part of our wedding vows. Without it, our bodies get stagnant and agitated. This is one of the most important investments of your time and energy. If you hate exercise, find a fulfilling movement practice that doesn't *feel* like exercise to you. What types of movement did you enjoy in the past? If you like competition, join a sports team. If you like community, join a class. If you like intimacy, start partner dance classes. If you like nature, take up walks or running. Don't exercise because you *\*should.\** This is another example of bio-individuality!
- **Deep friendships.** I can't count how many times my friends have saved me from a spiral while in partnership. These are people you build an intimate relationship with, that you can go to for empathy, or for a loving bitch-slap when you're stuck in a victim-story in your mind. Finding a BFI BFF will help if you don't have this yet! It's important to feel truly seen-- not judged-- but also held to a high standard. Also, limit time with people that drain you. If it's caretaking your relationship that's draining you, we'll take a look at that later, but for now, simplify your other relationships.
- **Finances/career.** This one doesn't seem like it would have a lot to do with relationship anxiety, but it actually totally does and it's not superficial at all. How is your satisfaction with your career? Are you being treated with dignity? Is there room to put yourself first a bit more? Do you have enough to pay your bills? If not, it's time to change something.
- **Air quality.** If possible, invest in a good quality air filter and limit exposure to mold, smoke, smog, or other airborne toxins. Our breath is our *prana*, or *qi*, or life force. So make sure you're taking good care of your lungs!

## **Variables, cont.**

- **Spirituality.** Both Feet In takes a spiritual approach, but not in a dogmatic sense. Like food, career, and exercise, spirituality is also highly individual. To me, spirituality is our relationship to the Great Unknown: that beyond which we can touch, smell, taste, see, and hear. The mysterious void, the force that governs the laws of nature, and where we go after we die. Why is spirituality important? I believe it is important to have a practice that connects us to something beyond ourselves... otherwise, we will come to be overly attached to tangibles, forgetting that none of this is entitled to us. Trusting life, and the mystery, requires us to have a relationship to the mystery. Be it a miraculous force you feel inside after you cry, a relationship to an entity you call God, simply focusing on your breath a few times a day, or a silent space you access while in nature, I recommend you have something beyond your relationship and purpose that brings you peace and meaning.
- **Sleep.** Aim to get 7-9 hours of sleep per night. This is one of those imperative variables to rule out before you start assuming you're in the wrong relationship. Brad Pitt himself won't pull you out of the crankiness that comes with a poor night's sleep. If you're in a phase of life where sleep is non-existent, like kids... do what you can, but also know that feeling disconnected from your partner during this time is normal. Once the contextual challenge of sleep improves, the relationship ought to improve, as well.
- **Thyroid.** I'm no thyroid expert, but if your thyroid hormones aren't in balance, you will feel unexplainably "off." This also goes for auto-immune conditions.

## **Variables, cont.**

- **Antidepressants.** I am not anti-pharmaceuticals (I got my degree in pre-pharmacy, after all!). I also know they dampen your ability to feel, which can be sometimes necessary. However, in this program you'll be expanding your capacity to hold big feelings, which the effects of the medicine may undermine. What works for you now might not work for you 3 months from now, so be open to staying in open conversation with your doctor about the changes you're going through.
- **Gut health.** Did you know 95% of your serotonin, also known as the body's "happy hormone," is made in your gut? Think of your gut bacteria as "helpers" or "soldiers" that metabolize your food and turn them into building blocks for the sanctuary that is your body and keep your gut running optimally. Help out your gut. Eat whole foods, eat fiber-rich meals, consume probiotics and digestive enzymes, and eat slowly, sitting down, ideally not with a device but with actual people around. Studies have shown that people who eat with company digest their food better than people who eat alone or on their phones. If you live in a cold climate, and/or are prone to cold hands and feet, or it's wintertime, eat warming, cooked foods like soups and stews (these are much easier to digest in colder contexts). If it's hotter, or your body runs hot, consume cooling foods like salads and smoothies.

# **Variables, cont.**

## **Follow-up questions to consider**

1. Which lifestyle variables need your support, that are within your control?
2. In which lifestyle categories do you have current willingness to make changes?
3. How can you make a few tweaks and keep them simple? Are there ways to double or triple up on any of these? What can you drop to make space for these changes? (For example, if both your exercise and spirituality are lacking, perhaps you can take up yoga)

*Next: Share your plans with the Facebook group with a photo of your first action step.*