

I have anxiety - when do I use GABA and when do I use tryptophan and how much of each do I use?

By Trudy Scott, Food Mood Expert and Nutritionist,
author of *The Antianxiety Food solution*



When you have anxiety, it can be confusing trying to figure out the root cause. I like to start by assessing for low GABA and low serotonin because when you address low levels of these brain chemicals with the corresponding targeted individual amino acid (GABA for low GABA levels and tryptophan or 5-HTP for low serotonin levels) you typically see results very quickly and feel hopeful, and now have time to look for other root causes like gluten issues, high cortisol, gut issues, dietary changes etc.

But there is often still some confusion about when to use GABA and when to use tryptophan and how much of each of these amino acids to use.

I'd like to share a question I received from one of my wonderful blog readers and my response, so you will have a clearer understanding for yourself:

I have started with Source Naturals GABA Calm 125 mg, 2 on awakening and two in mid-afternoon, and 2 x GABA Relaxer at bedtime. It has taken

some anxiety edge away from me, but I still feel some anxiety on and off, not so severe as before. I used to feel very anxious on awakening. I want to improve more.

Today, I ordered Lidtke L-tryptophan 500mg and am expecting to receive it in a week. I plan to take 2 x Gaba Calm on awakening and 2 in mid-afternoon, then add one x 500mg Tryptophan mid-afternoon and one x 500 mg tryptophan at bed time.

Is this a good plan? Or shall I have 2 x GABA Calm on awakening, 2 x tryptophan mid-afternoon and 2 x tryptophan at bedtime.

It's an excellent question and there is also no specific formula to be followed because each person is different and when I'm working with someone (one-on-one or in one of my group programs) we're figuring out what is working and why and adjusting accordingly. However, there are some guidelines to follow:

- if something is working, we continue with that until no additional benefits are seen
- we use the trial method to figure out starting dose, assess how much it will help and if we actually need GABA or tryptophan
- we start low and increase slowly, monitoring response
- we trial one amino acid at a time

GABA for taking away the anxiety edge

I have to say I'm so pleased to hear the GABA product has taken some of the anxiety edge away. I would expect this when someone has the low GABA type of anxiety - physical tension and stiff and tense muscles, often with insomnia and a need to self-medicate with wine to de-stress. I hear this all the time despite the fact I continue to be asked the blood brain barrier question and does GABA really work as a supplement.

Ask yourself what low GABA anxiety symptoms (this is the physical anxiety) have improved with the GABA and how much (rate each one before – out of 10; and what are they now – out of 10).

From her question it sounds like her symptoms could improve more – so if we were working together, I'd continue to increase GABA during the day and at night before adding something new. I'd do this until the low GABA symptoms are resolved or until no additional benefits are observed.

The biggest take-aways with GABA:

- I find that GABA works best when used sublingually and this is one reason I like Source Naturals GABA Calm so much (see below for more on this). If this is not an option (it does contain sugar alcohols that some clients can't or won't use and does contain tyrosine which as some contraindications) then opening a capsule of a GABA-only or a GABA-theanine combination are my next choices when working with someone.
- I start clients very low and increase as needed. I have found 125mg to be a good starting dose, but some pixie dust clients do well on a dab or pinch
- Do a trial to determine if the anxiety is in fact due to low GABA. I always do this with clients before starting any amino acid. Be sure to read [how to do an amino acid trial](#) – it has the low GABA questionnaire, the precautions and information on how to use targeted individual amino acids.

Here are some of the actual GABA products I recommend and use with clients:

- Source Naturals GABA Calm. This is a pleasant-tasting sublingual product that is my most popular and most effective form of GABA I use with my clients. It contains 125 mg GABA and some glycine, taurine and magnesium, and a small amount of tyrosine to counter the calming effects. You can see the lozenges in the picture above.
- Nutritional Fundamentals for Health GABA-T SAP: gamma-Aminobutyric acid (GABA) 300 mg, l-Theanine 150 mg. This is pleasant-tasting when opened on to the tongue and works very well when GABA Calm can't be used. I find best results when it is used opened on to the tongue and I really

like that it's a low dose of GABA. Some of my clients do well with half a capsule. You can see an opened capsule in the picture above.

- **Enzymatic Therapy GABA:** gamma-Aminobutyric acid (GABA) 250 mg. This is also pleasant-tasting when opened on to the tongue and works very well when GABA Calm can't be used. As with all GABA products, I find best results when it is used opened on to the tongue.
- **ProThera 500mg GABA:** gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) 500 mg. You will likely need to open this up and start with less than a full capsule during the day and increase as needed based on the trial. A full capsule may be fine at night for some individuals and more than one works in some situations.

Low serotonin type of anxiety and a tryptophan trial

Once we have the ideal amount of GABA and no more of the low GABA anxiety symptoms I'd then check what low serotonin symptoms my client has. These are the busy mind, ruminations type or worry anxiety, together with insomnia, PMS, irritability, anger and afternoon/evening carb cravings.

If she does have some of these symptoms, we pick one or two symptoms and do a trial with 1 x 500mg tryptophan opened on to the tongue (or less if she's super sensitive). She will rate the symptoms out of 10 before the tryptophan trial and then after the trial. Depending on how she responds on the trial, we'll decide if she needs 1 or 2 x 500mg mid-afternoon and evening. The bedtime dose also depends on how bad the insomnia is. We continue to increase as needed based on symptoms until she has no more low serotonin type symptoms or until no additional benefits are observed.

When it comes to serotonin support Lidtke is the only brand of tryptophan that I recommend simply because I see it work so well and because of quality issues with tryptophan in the past. Here are the Lidtke tryptophan products I recommend:

- Lidtke Tryptophan 500mg (this is ideal for doing a targeted trial, opened; it doesn't taste very good and if a client needs to continue taking it this way we have them mix it with inositol or even glutamine powder)

- Lidtke Tryptophan Complete (I start with 500mg tryptophan. Once you have figured out you do well with tryptophan-only product and have your dose, then you could consider reducing it slightly after about 2-3 weeks and adding in additional Tryptophan Complete. [Read more here.](#))
- Lidtke Chewable Tryptophan (this is also good for doing a trial and if lower doses are better; it's also wonderful for children)

I like to call GABA and tryptophan the amazing amino acids because by using them to address neurotransmitter deficiencies you can eliminate or reduce anxiety, mood issues and insomnia, and end food addictions and out-of-control sugar cravings very quickly.

Other changes and foundational work

All the while we are starting to make other changes – foundational work like switching to real whole food with quality animal protein/healthy fats/organic veggies and fruit/fermented foods, eating for blood sugar balance (this and using glutamine helps with the low blood sugar anxiety type), no caffeine, no sugar, looking for high cortisol, no gluten, looking at gut health and for other nutritional deficiencies.

3 brain chemical anxiety types and additional resources

Remember when it comes to brain chemical imbalances and anxiety, we have 3 anxiety types:

1. Low GABA anxiety type (physical anxiety, more stiff and tense muscles)
2. Low serotonin anxiety type (mental anxiety, ruminations, negative self-talk, worry)
3. Low blood sugar anxiety type (physical anxiety, but more shaky)

You need to figure out which type of anxiety you are experiencing and address that. It can be different for each person but it's not uncommon to experience all 3 of the above types, ideally one by one so you have a good handle on what's working and what isn't.

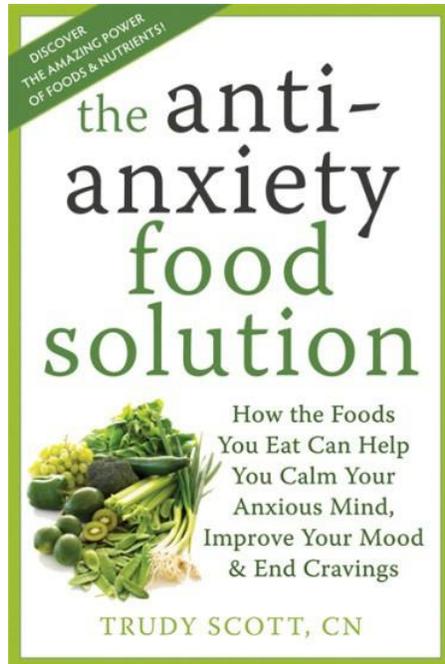
Here are some links to additional resources related to all this:

- The [amino acid questionnaire](#) to help you figure out which anxiety type you have: low GABA or low serotonin or low blood sugar
- [Glutamine for calming, intense sugar cravings, gut healing and low blood sugar](#) (if you also have the low blood sugar anxiety)
- [How to do an amino acid trial](#)
- [Targeted individual amino acids: what do we really mean?](#) (we are all unique and there is no one-size fits all approach)
- If you do not have my book *The Antianxiety Food Solution*, I highly recommend getting it and reading it before jumping in to taking amino acids. There is an entire chapter on this topic and it's smart to be well-informed.
- Here are [the supplements I use with my clients](#)
- Here are additional anxiety nutrition resources on *The Anxiety Summit* <https://www.theanxiety summit.com/> (season 6 airs November 2020 –register now and get access to prior summit interviews)



Food Mood Expert Trudy Scott is a certified nutritionist on a mission to educate and empower anxious individuals worldwide about natural solutions for anxiety, stress and emotional eating. She is passionate about sharing the powerful food mood connection because she experienced the results first-hand, finding complete resolution of her anxiety and panic attacks.

Trudy is the author of *The Antianxiety Food Solution: How the Foods You Eat Can Help You Calm Your Anxious Mind, Improve Your Mood and End Cravings*, available in major books stores and via online stores like Amazon. You can [find out more here](#).



“Excellent job of explaining the science behind anxiety and then bringing it to a practical level” - Elizabeth Lipski, PhD, CCN, author *Digestive Wellness*

“A real tour de force in complementary mental health literature & refreshingly original”
- Jonathan Prousky, ND, author of *Anxiety: Orthomolecular Diagnosis and Treatment*

“Replete with specific and practical suggestions, this book is backed up by research and clinical expertise”
- Julia Ross, MA, MFT, author of *The Mood Cure*