

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?



Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is characterized by persistent and excessive worry that gets in the way of normal daily functioning. While everyone worries occasionally, people diagnosed with GAD may feel like their mind is constantly running and can have a very difficult time controlling their worrying, even when there may be little reason to worry.

What are signs and symptoms of GAD?

- Worrying constantly and excessively about stressors, such as health, family, school, work, etc.
- Inability to control worries
- Feeling that things will go wrong
- Expecting the worst in all or most situations
- Feeling irritable towards others
- Feeling restless and unable to relax
- Feeling fatigued or worn out
- Difficulty concentrating on normal routines
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Body aches and pains (e.g., head aches or stomachaches)
- Muscle tension
- Feeling nauseous or lightheaded
- Feeling out of breath

How is GAD treated?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps people understand and change the way that they think about daily situations to reduce anxiety. It also teaches people more effective ways of responding to situations that may produce anxiety to help them overcome fears and challenge worrisome thinking.

Medication Management

Your doctor may prescribe a medication that can help treat symptoms of GAD. The two most commonly used are SSRIs and anti-anxiety medications. Be sure to talk to your doctor about your symptoms and treatment options to determine the best course of treatment for you.

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What are some ways to cope with GAD?

Anxiety can produce unpleasant physical symptoms due to the body's natural response to fear called the "fight-or-flight response." To help interrupt this response and decrease these symptoms, try the following:

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Taking slow, controlled deep breaths can help slow down the body's response to anxiety and reduce symptoms. To practice this, find a quiet environment. Inhale through your nose while counting to 4, hold for 4, and exhale through your mouth while counting to 4. This skill often takes routine practice to be fully effective.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our muscles naturally tense when we feel anxious. Learning to recognize where you might be holding onto tension and releasing it can improve symptoms. Tense each of your muscles for a few seconds and then allow your muscles to relax. Take notice of how different your muscles feel when they are tensed versus relaxed.

How can I help my loved one?

- ✓ Reach out to offer support and encouragement.
- ✓ Listen and offer empathy without conveying judgment.
- ✓ Encourage activities that are fun, active, and distracting.
- ✓ Keep routines and schedules as normal and predictable as possible.
- ✓ Praise or reinforce improvements, even if they seem small.
- ✓ Ask how you can be helpful.
- ✓ Keep expectations appropriate and reasonable.

Who do I contact to find out more?

Referrals for cognitive behavioral therapy and medication management can be made by physicians, mental health professionals, other allied health professionals, or from the patient or family directly. If interested, please contact us as listed below.



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