



Global Wellness Monthly

October 2016



Do you worry too much?

How common is generalised anxiety disorder?

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a relatively common anxiety problem, affecting approximately three to four percent of the population. About twice as many women as men suffer from GAD.

Most research shows that generalised anxiety disorder begins between childhood and early adulthood and fluctuates over the lifecycle. It is diagnosed when someone spends at least six months worrying excessively about a number of everyday problems.

Some research suggests that genes play a moderate role in GAD. A major traumatic or stressful event may trigger GAD. GAD rarely occurs alone and is often accompanied by another anxiety disorder, depression, or substance abuse. These other conditions need to be treated along with GAD.

What are the symptoms of GAD?

Many unpleasant symptoms may accompany generalised anxiety disorder and include:

- Headaches
- Trembling, twitching
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea
- Difficulty breathing
- Sweating
- Frequent need to use bathroom
- Startled easily
- Lump in throat, difficulty swallowing
- Sleeplessness
- Restlessness
- Muscle tension
- Fatigue
- Irritability

About GAD

Unlike panic disorder, generalised anxiety usually does not cause people to avoid specific situations. Nonetheless, a cycle of anxiety and depression often develops, and may result in the person feeling there's no way out of the vicious cycle of anxiety and worry. People with GAD usually realise that their anxiety is more intense than the situation warrants, and normal life stresses may aggravate generalised anxiety.

Did you know?

World Mental Health Day takes place this month on 10th October.



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What treatments are available?

A thorough physical examination is essential to accurate diagnosis and treatment. A medical exam will rule out possible medical causes of anxiety. Because generalised anxiety can also result from the overuse, abuse, or misuse of medications, or substance abuse/dependence, it is important to report all medication, alcohol or other substance use to the treating doctor.

Once good physical health is confirmed, the person should seek help from a mental health professional with experience treating anxiety disorders. There might also be other psychological problems present, such as depression, substance abuse or other anxiety disorders and the mental health provider should be aware of all problems.

Treatments:

- **Relaxation techniques** — It is difficult for some people with generalised anxiety to settle down enough to have a quiet, reflective time where they can become calm, relax and feel peace and tranquility. Learning strategies to calm down and relax are one facet of overcoming this problem.
- **Psychotherapy** — Psychotherapy involves talking with a trained mental health professional to learn new strategies to deal with overwhelming anxiety. Generalised anxiety has been shown to respond best to a type of psychotherapy called cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). In CBT, the person gradually learns to view situations and problems from a different perspective and learns methods and techniques to reduce anxiety.
- **Medication** — Medications, commonly the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) have been found to be helpful in treating GAD.
- **Self-help and support groups** — Self-help methods and support groups may also be helpful. Treatment and medication need to be tailored to the person, so it is important that you work closely with your doctor (and/or therapist) to clarify the best treatment course for you.



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