

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)



You may have at some point felt preoccupation with life's various circumstances. This is considered a normal response to stressors such as family, financial, work, or health-related problems. However, anxiety is a feeling of fear, dread, and uncertainty that causes the person to have constant and uncomfortable sensations in their mind and body, interfering with various aspects of life.

What is generalized anxiety disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) refers to a persistent feeling of anxiety and worry that doesn't go away and may even get worse over time. The symptoms can make it difficult to perform daily activities (shopping, driving, participating in social events, etc.) affecting tasks related to work, school, and interpersonal relationships. Generalized anxiety can lead to phobias (exaggerated, involuntary, irrational fear of situations or other things) or panic attacks (sudden moments of extreme fear).

Causes

Although external circumstances such as having gone through a traumatic event, living around stressful situations or in unsafe environments can be the reason for GAD, its cause, too, could be hereditary. In addition, the amygdala, adrenal glands, or a brain condition can cause an overproduction of chemicals that generate the physical symptoms of GAD.

Symptoms

- Feeling too much worry about daily affairs and nervousness.
- Not being able to let go or forget a worry.
- Having trouble sleeping or staying asleep.

- Tiring easily or feeling tired all the time.
- Having headaches, muscle or stomach aches, palpitations, sweating, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, trouble swallowing, or unexplained discomfort.
- Having tremors or tics (strange, repetitive movements).
- Think long and hard about the decisions you need to make and avoid carrying them out when you understand that you will have the worst possible results.
- Perceiving places, situations, and events as threatening, even when they are not.



Diagnosis

The diagnosis for GAD is made from the symptoms. Once the person arrives for medical care, they will be asked questions about their physical and mental health. To rule out physical health problems, you'll likely have a physical exam, lab tests, or some other specialized study.

Once it is certain that the cause of your symptoms is not physical, you will likely be referred to a behavioral practitioner, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker.

This professional will perform a mental evaluation to establish the diagnosis and recommend appropriate treatment.

Treatment

The goal of treatment for GAD is to help the person feel relief from symptoms and better function in daily activities. A combination of psychotherapy and medication is usually recommended to treat symptoms.

Psychotherapy: Led by a human behavior professional, this therapy can provide the space for the person to express how they feel. You will be able to learn different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to various situations, in order to reduce your anxiety or worry levels.



Medications: A psychiatrist may prescribe medications to help treat generalized anxiety disorder. Different types of medications may be effective in treating this disorder.

Recommendations for Managing Anxiety

- Keep in mind that feeling better is possible. The brain is capable of learning new and better thought patterns.
- Identify those sensations that manifest in your body during anxiety episodes.
- Breathe, inhale, and exhale paying attention to how air moves in and out of your body. Repeat mindful breathing, noting the times you inhale and exhale, as many times as necessary.
- Be physically active.

- Eat healthy foods and don't smoke, avoid alcohol and illicit drugs. These substances can make anxiety worse.
- Talk to family or friends when you feel nervous or scared.
- If you are experiencing suicidal behavior or ideation, seek care immediately by calling the PAS line at: 1-800-981-0023.

Social and Emotional Aspect

For recommendations, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

APS Healthcare

787-641-9133

References:

(2023) <https://www.cigna.com/es-us/knowledge-center/hw/temas-de-salud/trastorno-de-ansiedad-generalizada-zd1045>

(2023) <https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000917.htm>

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