

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) Fact Sheet

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is characterized by persistent and excessive worry about a number of different things. People with GAD may anticipate disaster and may be overly concerned about money, health, family, work, or other issues. Individuals with GAD find it difficult to control their worry. They may worry more than seems warranted about actual events or may expect the worst even when there is no apparent reason for concern.

- GAD affects 6.8 million adults, or 3.1% of the U.S. population, in any given year
- Women are twice as likely to be affected
- The risk is highest between childhood and middle age

What are the symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

- Worry that is difficult to control on more days than not for at least six months
 - This differentiates GAD from worry that may be specific to a set stressor or for more limited period of time
- Possible physical symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches
- Possible avoidance of situations or not taking advantage of opportunities (social situations, travel, promotions, etc.) due to worry

What causes Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

- The exact cause of GAD is unknown
- Biological factors
- Family background
- Life experiences, particularly stressful ones

Treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Supportive and interpersonal therapy can help
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been more researched and specifically targets thoughts, physical symptoms and behaviors—including the over-preparation, planning and avoidance—that characterizes GAD
- Mindfulness based approaches and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) have also been investigated with positive outcome
- All therapies help people change their relationship to their symptoms. They help people to understand the nature of anxiety itself, to be less afraid of the presence of anxiety, and to help people make choices independent of the presence of anxiety
- There are a number of medication choices for GAD, usually SSRIs either alone or in combination with therapy
- Relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga, exercise, and other alternative treatments may also become part of a treatment plan.