



## Generalized Anxiety Disorder

### What is generalized anxiety disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is when you worry excessively and unrealistically. You may also be jittery, restless, or dizzy. When these symptoms last for at least 6 months, a diagnosis of GAD may be made.

You may have GAD with depression or by itself. It is estimated that almost 5% of people have had this disorder during their lives.

### How does it occur?

The cause of GAD is unknown. Genetic and environmental factors play a role. Women have GAD about twice as often as men.

The worry in GAD is not about panic attacks or being afraid in public places. It is typically "free-floating" anxiety out of proportion to any real life situation. The worrying can interfere with normal day-to-day activities and work or school.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include excessive, unrealistic, and uncontrollable worrying about many things such as:

- the state of the world
- the economy
- violence in society
- your job
- the bills
- chores
- family members.

Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, sleep problems, or feeling on edge usually go along with anxiety. You may be short-tempered and unable to focus or concentrate because of the worrying. You may be uneasy in a group or in a waiting room.

### How is it diagnosed?

There is no lab test for GAD. Your health care provider or therapist will ask about your symptoms and will make sure you do not have a medical problem and that you do not have a problem with drugs or alcohol before making the diagnosis.

If you have had the symptoms for at least 6 months, if you have had to cut back on your activities, and if you find it difficult to get things done, a diagnosis of GAD may be appropriate.

### **How is it treated?**

Different types of approaches have proven helpful in treating GAD. These include behavior therapy, relaxation therapy, cognitive therapy, and stress management techniques. Which treatment your health care provider or therapist uses may depend upon how much the disorder interferes with your day-to-day life.

Antianxiety and antidepressant medicines are helpful. Some medicines are:

- buspirone (BuSpar)
- selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) such as fluoxetine (Prozac), sertraline (Zoloft), fluvoxamine (Luvox), and paroxetine (Paxil)
- venlafaxine (Effexor)

### **How long will the effects last?**

GAD can last many years and sometimes an entire lifetime. Research is expected to continue in an effort to learn more about this disorder.

### **What can I do for myself?**

- Discuss your concerns with your health care provider or therapist.
- Discuss any medicine you may be taking with your provider.
- Realize that you are not alone and that your anxiety can be overcome.
- Do not use alcohol or other drugs to overcome your anxiety.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Go to a stress management class in your local community.

For further information, see:

You may also want to contact the National Mental Health Association (NMHA). NMHA's toll-free Information Center number is 1-800-969-NMHA. Its website address is <http://www.NMHA.org>.

Written by Naakesh A. Dewan, M.D.

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