



# GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER



**Rural Mental Health Resilience**  
*A Program of Hope®*

**In crisis? Call or text 988**

## What Is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a mental health condition that causes you to worry constantly and be overwhelmed with fear.

While most of us experience anxiety from time to time about such issues as health, finances, family or job responsibilities, people living with GAD are persistently distressed and worry excessively about these stressors and other everyday matters which can interfere with their daily productivity, relationships and quality of life.

## What Are the Symptoms of GAD?

If you have GAD, you may know that your anxiety is more intense than it should be, but you can't control your worrying and nervousness. Although GAD typically begins during childhood or adolescence, it may begin at any age.<sup>1</sup>

Symptoms of GAD can vary among people and fluctuate over time, but the following

include common physical symptoms:

- Excessive worry.
- Overwhelming fear.
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Headaches, muscle aches or unexplained pain.
- Nausea, diarrhea or irritable bowel syndrome.
- Inability to relax.
- Excessive sweating and shortness of breath.
- Feeling irritable and on edge.

## How Common Is GAD?

- GAD affects 6.8 million adults in the U.S., or 3.1% of the population.<sup>2</sup>
- Only 43.2% of people affected by GAD are receiving treatment.<sup>2</sup>
- GAD affects an estimated 2.2% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years.<sup>2</sup>

- Women (3.4%) are more likely to be affected by GAD compared to men (1.9%).<sup>3</sup>
- GAD often runs in families.<sup>4</sup>
- GAD frequently co-occurs with major depression.<sup>2</sup>

## How Is GAD Diagnosed?

If you're experiencing symptoms of GAD, talk to your healthcare provider. A diagnosis is made after a healthcare provider takes a careful history of your symptoms. They may also do a physical exam or order medical tests to rule out other health conditions. In addition, they may refer you to a mental health professional for evaluation.

Healthcare providers and mental health professionals will determine a GAD diagnosis based on specific criteria, including:<sup>4</sup>

- Your excessive anxiety and worry happen most days.
- You find it difficult to control the worry.
- You've experienced GAD symptoms for at least six months.

- Your anxiety interferes with your daily activities.

## How Is GAD Treated?

GAD is treatable.<sup>5</sup> The treatment options depend on the severity of the symptoms. A combination of treatments is typically required, such as psychotherapy and lifestyle changes. In addition, medications may also be necessary.

The following describes some treatments and strategies for managing GAD symptoms:

- **Psychotherapy** – also referred to as “talk therapy” – involves working with a therapist to reduce your anxiety symptoms, learn skills for relaxing and managing your worries and help you return to activities you avoided because of anxiety.
- **Medications** – including anti-anxiety drugs and anti-depressants – are often

prescribed in combination with psychotherapy. Remember that it often takes at least two to three weeks before you can feel the effects of the medication. Sometimes, people may have to try different medications to get results.

- **Healthy lifestyle choices** can play a role in helping to manage GAD symptoms, including exercising regularly, practicing meditation, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques, having good sleep habits, limiting caffeine intake and avoiding alcohol and substance use.

**Experiencing some anxiety is normal. But if you feel you are worrying too much and the anxiety is interfering with your relationships, work and other parts of your life, talk to your healthcare provider to determine a diagnosis and optimal treatment plan for you.**

### References:

1. John Hopkins Medicine. Health Conditions and Diseases: Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Accessed at: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/generalized-anxiety-disorder#:~:text=GAD%20means%20that%20you%20are,mon-ey%2C%20family%2C%20or%20work>
2. AK Mishra, AR Varma. A Comprehensive Review of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder. *Cureus*. 2023 Sep; 15(9): e46115. Sep 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10612137/#:~:text=GAD%20affects%206.8%20million%20adults,and%20environmental%20factors%20%5B2%5D>
3. National Institute of Mental Health. Mental Health Information: Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Accessed at: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/generalized-anxiety-disorder#:~:text=Prevalence%20of%20Generalized%20Anxiety%20Disorder%20Among%20Adults,-Based%20on%20diagnostic&text=An%20estimated%205.7%25%20of%20U.S.some%20time%20in%20their%20lives>
4. MG Gottschalk, K Domschke. Genetics of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Related Traits. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci*. 2017 Jun; 19(2): 159–168. Accessed at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573560/>
5. AB Locke, N Kirst, CG Schultz. Diagnosis and Management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder. *Am Fam Physician*. 2015;91(9):617–624. Accessed at: <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2015/0501/p617.html>

## For more information about GAD:

Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA)  
[adaa.org](http://adaa.org)

Anxiety Central  
[anxiety-central.com](http://anxiety-central.com)

Anxiety Network  
[anxietynetwork.com](http://anxietynetwork.com)



**In crisis? Call or text 988**

For mental health and suicide prevention information and resources, visit the Rural Mental Health Resilience Program website at [www.RuralMinds.org/resilience](http://www.RuralMinds.org/resilience) or via the QR code below:



**The good news is most people who get treatment for GAD improve and enjoy a better quality of life.**