

# GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:  
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

## Description

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is the most common form of clinical anxiety and is different from normal everyday worry. Where most people report having some general and specific worries, they are capable of controlling it. People with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) experience exaggerated worry and fears throughout the day with little or nothing provoking it. Their anxiety is intrusive, difficult to get off their mind, and often uncontrollable. They may be overly preoccupied with money, relationships, health issues, career, or ruminate about decisions and choices. GAD is twice as common in women as men. The disorder can occur at any age, but commonly manifests in adolescence to middle age. Untreated GAD is prone to the development of other issues such as depression or abuse of alcohol or drugs.

## Symptoms & Features

A thorough mental health diagnostic evaluation should be sought if three of the following symptoms are persisting for six months or more in conjunction with excessive worry and preoccupation that is difficult to control. 1) muscle tension, 2) disturbed sleep (insomnia or excess sleep), 3) being easily fatigued, 4) restlessness or feeling on the edge, 5) irritability, 6) indecisiveness or lack of concentration.

Unlike physical issues like strep throat there is no laboratory test to prove whether a person has Generalized Anxiety Disorder, which is why it is so important to be assessed by a specialist. There is no one single cause of GAD. Common factors include: Genetic factors – having family members with anxiety puts you at higher risk for developing GAD. Biochemical factors are known to be a factor and the dysregulation of neurotransmitters like serotonin and norepinephrine are often associated with GAD. Environmental stressors often play a role in the onset or persistence of GAD such as work stress, relationship conflict, or health concerns. Personality factors such as perfectionism, passivity, conflict avoidance and others can also play a role in GAD.

## Treatment

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is typically treated with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. The best course of treatment for each person is something that should be discussed with your physician or mental health therapist. Medicinal treatments include: Anti-depressants, Anti-anxiety medications, or Benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines are often given in limited circumstances for short term relief of symptoms and are used cautiously because they are habit forming and cause side effects such as drowsiness and reduced balance and coordination.

Behavioral Therapy and Cognitive Therapy have demonstrated through research to be especially effective in treating GAD and other anxiety disorders. Behavioral therapy targets specific behaviors that often perpetuate and reinforce the anxieties. Relaxation and breathing techniques are often used in conjunction with other methods to change behavioral patterns. Cognitive therapy teaches people how to identify and change negative thoughts and distortions in thinking that drive many of the anxiety provoking thoughts.

## What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you have many or most of the GAD symptoms, consider getting assessed by one of the clinicians at I.P.C. who can assist in making a diagnosis and figure out the best course of treatment. In addition, you can read about GAD and its treatment. You can join a support group, or talk with family and friends that you trust. Learning stress management, meditation, find activities that help you relax, and utilizing social supports can help alleviate some symptoms and are good preventative measures against GAD. Caffeine, certain illicit, and over the counter drugs can aggravate symptoms of anxiety and should be avoided.