



Generalised Anxiety (GAD)

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is much more than the normal anxiety people experience day to day.

It is chronic and exaggerated worry and tension, even though nothing seems to provoke it. Having this disorder means always anticipating disaster, often worrying excessively about health, money, family, or work. Sometimes, though, the source of the worry is hard to pinpoint. Simply the thought of getting through the day provokes anxiety.

Symptoms and Signs

People with GAD can't seem to shake their concerns, even though they usually realise that their anxiety is more intense than the situation warrants. People with GAD also seem unable to relax. They often have trouble falling or staying asleep. Their worries are accompanied by physical symptoms, especially trembling, twitching, muscle tension, headaches, irritability, sweating, or hot flushes. They may feel light-headed or out of breath. They may feel nauseated or have to go to the bathroom frequently or they might feel as though they have a lump in the throat.

Many individuals with GAD are startled more easily than other people. They tend to feel tired, have trouble concentrating and sometimes suffer depression.

Usually the impairment associated with GAD is mild and people with the disorder don't feel too restricted in social settings or on the job. Unlike many other anxiety disorders, people with GAD don't characteristically avoid certain situations as a result of their feelings. However, if severe, GAD can be very debilitating, making it difficult to carry out even the most ordinary daily activities.

GAD comes on gradually and most often develops during childhood or adolescence, but can begin in adulthood too. It is suggested that as with other anxiety disorders GAD is a genetic illness/disorder. It is diagnosed when someone spends at least 6 months worrying excessively about a number of everyday problems.

Treatment

Generalised anxiety is a treatable complaint and successful intervention may include both medication and cognitive-behavioural therapy. Other therapies are often used as in the case where people have had a severely dysfunctional childhood, loss of a family member and or other grief provoking episodes in their lives.

Diagnostic Criteria – Generalised Anxiety Disorder

- a) Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least six months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance).
- b) The person finds it difficult to control worry.
- c) The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms present for more days than not for the past six months):
 - 1) restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
 - 2) being easily fatigued
 - 3) difficulty in concentrating or mind going blank
 - 4) irritability
 - 5) muscle tension
 - 6) sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless unsatisfying sleep)