

GENERALIZED ANXIETY

Definition

It's normal to feel anxious or worried at times. Everyone does. In fact, a moderate amount of anxiety can be good. Anxiety helps you respond appropriately to real danger, and it can help motivate you to excel at work and at home.

But if you often feel very anxious without reason and your worries disrupt your daily life, you may have generalized anxiety disorder. Generalized anxiety disorder causes excessive or unrealistic anxiety and worry — well beyond what's appropriate for a situation.

Living with generalized anxiety disorder can be difficult, but treatment is available. Medications and psychotherapy can help ease symptoms, and you can learn healthy coping skills to manage generalized anxiety disorder and take back your life.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder can vary in combination or severity. Generalized anxiety disorder symptoms may include:

- Restlessness
- Feeling of being keyed up or on edge
- Feeling a lump in your throat
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Impatience
- Being easily distracted
- Muscle tension
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Excessive sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Stomachache
- Diarrhea
- Headache

If you have generalized anxiety disorder, you may experience times when your worries don't completely consume you, but you still feel rather anxious. You may feel on edge about many or all aspects of your life. For example, you may feel intense worry about your safety or that of your loved ones, or you may have a general sense that something bad is about to happen, even when there's no apparent danger.

Generalized anxiety disorder often begins at an early age, and the signs and symptoms may develop more slowly than in other anxiety disorders. Many people with generalized anxiety disorder can't recall when they last felt relaxed or at ease.

Coping and support

Living with generalized anxiety disorder can truly be difficult. In addition to dealing with excessive worry, you may also have feelings of depression to cope with. Ultimately, anxiety may affect your interaction with friends and family, your productivity at work, and the overall quality of your life.

Still, there are healthy ways to cope with generalized anxiety disorder, even when it becomes a chronic condition that may always have a small presence in your life.

Some ways to cope with generalized anxiety disorder include:

- Joining an anxiety support group. Here, you can find compassion, understanding and shared experiences.
- Taking action. Work with your mental health provider to figure out what's making you anxious and address it. For example, if finances are your concern, work toward drawing up a budget.
- Letting it go. Don't dwell on past concerns. Change what you can and let the rest take its course. Repeat as needed.
- Breaking the cycle. When you feel anxious, take a brisk walk or delve into a hobby to refocus your mind away from your worries.
- Taking care of yourself. Get enough rest, eat a balanced diet, exercise and take time to relax. Avoid caffeine and nicotine, which can worsen anxiety. Don't turn to alcohol or unprescribed drugs for relief.
- Sticking to your treatment plan. Take medications as directed. Keep therapy appointments. Consistency can help keep your treatment plan on track.

- Socializing. Don't let worries make you isolated from loved ones or enjoyable activities. Touching base with others offers a healthy diversion.