

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER

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**“The best use
of imagination
is creativity.
The worst use
of imagination
is anxiety”**

Deepak Chopra

What is Generalised Anxiety Disorder?

Generalised Anxiety Disorder is intense anxiety and worry about a variety of events and issues (for example, work, health, family), and the worry is out of proportion to the situation. People with Generalised Anxiety Disorder have difficulty controlling their worry. They may feel like they are always worrying about something, but that they cannot help it. Along with worrying, they often experience a high level of physical tension. This might be described as feeling restless, easily tired, difficulty concentrating, easily annoyed, muscle tension, and/or difficulty sleeping. While many people worry about things from time to time, people with Generalised Anxiety Disorder experience worry a large proportion of the time and it interrupts their lives. While many people go through times when they worry more than others, people with Generalised Anxiety Disorder usually have a long history of worrying even when there are no significant issues to worry about.

Common issues that people with Generalised Anxiety Disorder may worry about include:

- Future job opportunities
- That family will disapprove of them
- Being able to afford to pay bills
- Losing close friends
- Being late for an appointment
- Making mistakes at work
- Uncertainty

Causes

Genetics and temperament

Children can inherit genes that make them more vulnerable to developing an anxiety disorder. Similarly, children who are born with a timid temperament or personality style, and who are easily upset in new situations, appear more likely to develop an anxiety disorder such as Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

Parental factors

Children who grow up in families where others have anxiety are more likely to develop an anxiety disorder such as Generalised Anxiety Disorder. For example, if children have a parent who is seen frequently worrying about future events, the child may learn this behaviour themselves, and that future events should be feared.

Thinking (cognitive) style

People with Generalised Anxiety Disorder tend to have negative beliefs about uncertainty. For example, if there is uncertainty, they tend to predict that something negative or bad will happen. They might have lots of thoughts that start with, "What if?" People with Generalised Anxiety Disorder may also tend to believe that worrying about things can be helpful. For example, they may believe that worrying helps them prepare in case something bad happens.

Learning experiences and negative life events

Experiencing negative life events, such as ones that are stressful, traumatic, and uncontrollable, can be factors that lead to developing Generalised Anxiety Disorder. When negative life events happen that are upsetting and out of our control, this can lead to anxiety about uncertainty in the future. Worrying is sometimes a strategy that people use when they fear uncertainty.

Seeking help

If you experience high anxiety and worry, which is significantly interfering in your day to day life, there are effective treatments available. You can seek help at:

- Your GP. Your GP can refer you to a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. Your GP is the best person to start with when looking for effective treatment for Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

Like all anxiety disorders, Generalised Anxiety Disorder is highly treatable.





Martina - WayAhead's Anxiety Support Group Leader

Treatment

Psychological therapies

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is a recommended psychological treatment for Generalised Anxiety Disorder. CBT is a practical treatment, and involves teaching practical skills to deal with anxiety symptoms. CBT helps people understand how their problems, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours affect each other, as well as strategies to gain more control their worries. CBT helps people to question their negative and anxious thoughts, and to do things that would normally be avoided due to anxiety. CBT helps people to begin to change these behaviours, and reduce their anxiety.

Applied relaxation is also a treatment recommended by NICE clinical guidelines. Applied relaxation focuses on teaching people how to use muscle relaxation techniques when they are feeling anxious or in situations that could make them feel anxious.

Online treatment programs for some anxiety disorders, including Generalised Anxiety Disorder, have recently been developed. Online treatment programs are based on CBT. Online treatment programs may involve some contact with a therapist over the Internet. Recent research has shown that online treatment programs can be effective in reducing anxiety symptoms.

Medication

A type of anti-depressant medication known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) has been found to be effective in treating Generalised Anxiety Disorder over the short-term and the long-term. If the medication does not help, a different SSRI may be offered. If this does not help, a different type of medication called a serotonin-noradrenalin reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) may be offered. Your GP or psychiatrist will need to prescribe this medication to you.

How family and friends can help

- Try to understand the person with Generalised Anxiety Disorder's worries, and remember that although you may not find them worrying, to the person with Generalised Anxiety Disorder the worries will cause intense anxiety
- Avoid telling a person with Generalised Anxiety Disorder to just snap out of it or get over their worries
- Encourage the person with Generalised Anxiety Disorder to seek professional treatment and to persist with it

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory

is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW.

www.WayAhead.org.au

Phone Lines

**WayAhead Mental Health
Information Line**

1300 794 991

Contact your doctor or Local GP

Local community Mental Health
Service

Useful Websites

WayAhead

understandinganxiety.org.au

information about anxiety, and links
to anxiety support groups

BeyondBlue

beyondblue.org.au

information about anxiety

Australian Psychological Society

psychology.org.au

1800 22 4636

Information about anxiety and
contact details for psychologists
who treat anxiety disorders

**The Virtual Clinic - online treatment
programs for anxiety**

www.virtualclinic.org.au



Translating & Interpreting Service
(TIS) 131 450

Please call the Mental Health
Information Line through the
Telephone Interpreter Service
(TIS). Free to Australian citizens or
permanent residents.

References:

Cochrane review www.cochrane.org

NICE guidelines www.nice.org.uk

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed.

This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW.

The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

Last reviewed by Emma Pinn 2016

**“ I found people who
understood exactly what I
was going through ”**



