

Generalized anxiety disorder:

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is the psychological term used to describe that psychological condition where one is generally anxious about everything. It is much more than the normal anxiety people experience day to day. Without provocation, it is chronic and exaggerated worry and tension. This disorder involves anticipating disaster, often worrying excessively about health, money, family or work. Sometimes, though, just the thought of getting through the day brings on anxiety.

People with GAD can't shake their concerns, even though they usually realize that much of their anxiety is unwarranted. People with GAD also seem unable to relax and often have trouble falling or staying asleep. Their worries are often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as muscle tension, headaches, irritability, sweating, hot flashes and feeling light-headed or out of breath.

Many individuals with GAD startle more easily than other people. They tend to feel tired, have trouble concentrating and may suffer from depression. GAD may involve nausea, frequent trips to the bathroom or feeling like there is a lump in the throat.

GAD could affect up to 5% of people and about twice as many women as men. The disorder comes on gradually and can begin at any time, though the risk is highest between up to middle age. It is diagnosed when someone persistently worries excessively about a number of everyday problems.

It is characterized by chronic, exaggerated worry and tension that is unfounded or much more severe than the normal anxiety most people experience. People with this disorder usually:

- Expect the worst
- Worry excessively about money, health, family or work, when there are no signs of trouble
- Are unable to relax
- Are irritable
- Suffer from insomnia
- Have physical symptoms, such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headaches, irritability or hot flashes

Like heart disease and diabetes, anxiety disorders are complex and probably result from a combination of genetic, behavioural, developmental and other factors. Studies of twins and families suggest that genes play a role in the origin of anxiety disorders. Genetic factors may explain why only certain individuals exposed to similar traumatic events develop full-blown anxiety disorders.

Specific types of counselling or medication are the typical treatments of choice for this condition. The choice of one or the other, or both, depends on the person's preference, and also on the particular problem.

Psychotherapy involves talking with a trained mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or counsellor to learn how to deal with problems like this. Research has shown that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), a form of psychotherapy, is effective for several anxiety disorders. It has two components. The

cognitive component helps people change thinking patterns that keep them from overcoming their fears. For example, a person with panic disorder might be helped to see that his or her panic attacks are not really heart attacks; the tendency to put the worst possible interpretation on physical symptoms can be overcome. Similarly, a person with social phobia might be helped to overcome the belief that others are continually watching and harshly judging him or her.

The behavioural component of CBT seeks to change people's reactions to anxiety-provoking situations. A key element of this component is exposure, in which people confront the things they fear. Another behavioural technique is to teach the patient deep breathing as a relaxation aid.

Anxiety can also be a consequence of an anxious personality. The anxious personality is someone whose very character or disposition toward life has always been anxious, even as a child. In this situation it is not so much that you have a generally non-anxious person who is suffering from an-out-of-character disorder but rather the anxiety is in-character for how they have always been. However, even in this situation, the anxious personality can benefit from a process of self-examination and can often find considerable relief in correcting some of the assumptions they may have carried about life from a very early age.