

## **Introduction**

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam or having a medical test or job interview.

During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal.

However, some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and can often affect their daily life.

Anxiety is the main symptom of several conditions, including panic disorder, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder and social anxiety disorder (social phobia).

However, the information in this section is about a specific condition called generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

## **Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)**

GAD is a long-term condition that causes you to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event. People with GAD feel anxious most days and often struggle to remember the last time they felt relaxed. GAD can cause both psychological

(mental) and physical symptoms.

These vary from person to person, but can include feeling restless or worried and having trouble concentrating or sleeping.

Read about the [symptoms of GAD](#)

### **When to see your GP**

Although feelings of anxiety at certain times are completely normal, you should see your GP if anxiety is affecting your daily life or is causing you distress.

Your GP will ask you about your symptoms and your worries, fears and emotions to try to find out if you could have GAD.

Read more about [diagnosing GAD](#)

### **What causes GAD?**

The exact cause of GAD is not fully understood, although it's likely that a combination of several factors plays a role. Research has suggested these may include:

- overactivity in areas of the brain involved in emotions and behaviour
- an imbalance of the brain chemicals serotonin and noradrenaline, which are involved in the control and regulation of mood
- the genes you inherit from your parents – you're estimated to be five times more

likely to develop GAD if you have a close relative with the condition

- having a history of stressful or traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence, child abuse or bullying
- having a painful long-term health condition, such as [arthritis](#)
- having a history of drug or [alcohol misuse](#)

However, many people develop GAD for no apparent reason.

### **Who is affected?**

GAD is a common condition estimated to affect about 1 in every 25 people in the UK.

Slightly more women are affected than men, and the condition is more common in people between the ages of 35 and 55.

### **How GAD is treated**

GAD can have a significant effect on your daily life, but several different treatments are available that can help ease your symptoms. These include:

- psychological therapy— such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- medication – such as a type of antidepressant called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)

There are also many things you can do yourself to help reduce your anxiety, such as going on a self-help course, exercising regularly, stopping smoking and cutting down on the amount of alcohol and caffeine you drink.

With treatment, many people are able to control their levels of anxiety. However, some treatments may need to be continued for a long time and there may be periods where your symptoms worsen.

Read more about [treating GAD](#) and [self-help tips for GAD](#)