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Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a common mental health condition where you often feel very anxious about lots of different things.

This page is about adults aged 18 and over with GAD. Find out about [anxiety disorders in children](#).

Get urgent help

Support is available if you or someone you know are having a mental health crisis or emergency, no matter what you're going through.

[Find out where to get urgent help for mental health](#)

Symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

The main symptom of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is feelings of stress or worry that affect your daily life and are difficult to control.

Other symptoms of GAD may include:

- difficulty sleeping
- feeling restless, irritable or finding it difficult to concentrate
- getting tired easily
- feeling tense
- stomach problems
- a more noticeable or unusual heartbeat (palpitations)
- feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- [low mood or depression](#)

There are also other types of anxiety disorder and it's common to have more than one at the same time. For example:

- sudden attacks of anxiety and panic ([panic disorder](#))
- an overwhelming fear of something specific ([phobias](#))

If you're not sure it's GAD

Most people feel anxious sometimes. It does not always mean you have GAD.

It's more likely to be GAD if you feel anxious most of the time and it affects your everyday life.

If you're not sure you have GAD, [see our general advice about getting help with anxiety.](#)

See a GP if:

- you think you might have generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)
- you've been diagnosed with GAD and treatments are not helping

Other ways to get help

If you're 18 years old or over, you can also refer yourself directly to an NHS talking therapies service without a referral from a GP.

 [Find NHS talking therapies for anxiety and depression](#)

If you're pregnant or have given birth within the last 12 months, your midwife, doctor or health visitor can also help you get support.

How generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is diagnosed

If you see a GP about symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), they'll ask you some questions about your worries and physical symptoms.

It's important to try and be honest with them, even if it may be difficult to talk about your emotions. This will help them to diagnose or rule out an anxiety disorder.

A GP may diagnose GAD if you have the typical symptoms and:

- you often worry about a wide range of things
- feelings of anxiety are affecting your daily life
- you're finding it hard to control your feelings
- you have felt anxious a lot of the time for at least 6 months

Treatment for generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

Treatment for generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) can help you to manage your symptoms, but it may take time.

The main treatments a GP may offer include:

- talking therapies – usually [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#) with the support of a therapist, either by yourself or in a group
- medicines that can help to treat anxiety – usually a type of [antidepressant](#) called an SSRI
- referral to a community mental health team with a range of specialists who can help to create a treatment plan for you

A GP will usually advise you to try talking therapies before they prescribe medicine or refer you to a specialist.

Find out more

- [NHS talking therapies for anxiety and depression](#)

- [Treatments for anxiety and panic attacks](#) ([Mind](#)).

Things you can try to help with anxiety

If you have generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), there are things you can try yourself that may help to ease the symptoms of anxiety.

Do

- ✓ try talking about your feelings to a friend, family member, health professional or counsellor – you could also contact [Samaritans](#) by calling 116 123 or emailing jo@samaritans.org if you need someone to talk to
- ✓ try recommended [self-help therapies](#) - such as books, online tools or courses that you can do in your own time
- ✓ learn how to relax using [calming breathing exercises](#) or try activities such as yoga or pilates
- ✓ try to get enough sleep – this can help you have the energy you need to cope with difficult feelings and experiences
- ✓ [exercise](#) regularly - activities such as running, walking, swimming and yoga can reduce anxiety and stress and help you sleep better
- ✓ eat a [healthy diet](#) with regular meals to keep your energy levels stable

Don't

- ✗ do not focus on the things you cannot change – focus your time and energy into helping yourself feel better
- ✗ do not avoid situations that make you anxious – try slowly building up time spent in worrying situations to gradually reduce anxiety
- ✗ do not drink lots of coffee, tea, cola or energy drinks – they contain caffeine which can disrupt your sleep and make it harder to control your anxiety
- ✗ do not use alcohol, cigarettes, gambling or drugs to relieve anxiety as these can all contribute to poor mental health

Find out more

- [Get help with anxiety, fear or panic](#)
- [Self-help CBT techniques from Every Mind Matters](#) – learn how to manage stress and worry, and boost your mental wellbeing

Help and support for generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

If you have generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), you can get support from your GP. They'll also be able to give you information about local support services you may find helpful.

There are also national and local charities such as Mind, Rethink Mental Illness and Anxiety UK that offer information and support for anyone affected by GAD.

Online or local support groups

There are charities that offer local or online support groups for anyone affected by GAD.

- [How to find a support group \(Mind\)](#)
- [Find a support group in your area \(Rethink Mental Illness\)](#)

Support for family, friends and carers

If you care for someone who has GAD, you can get advice and support from charities.

- [Helping someone with anxiety and panic attacks \(Mind\)](#)
- [Caring for someone else's mental health \(Rethink Mental Illness\)](#)

More information and advice

You can read more information and advice about GAD on charity websites.

- [Treatment and support for anxiety \(Mind\)](#)
- [Mental health advice and information service \(Rethink Mental Illness\)](#)
- [Free downloadable guides \(Anxiety UK\)](#)

Causes of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) does not usually have an obvious cause, but there are some things that can increase your chances of having GAD.

These include having:

- another anxiety disorder, such as panic disorder or social phobia
- close relatives with anxiety disorders, depression or other mental health conditions
- a history of stressful or traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence, child abuse or bullying
- a painful long-term health condition, such as arthritis
- a history of drug or alcohol misuse

GAD is also more common in women than men.

Page last reviewed: 22 October 2024

Next review due: 22 October 2027

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