

News Release

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When Worry Gets Out of Control: Generalized Anxiety Disorder Tampa, Florida (March, 2015). The National Institute of Mental Health provided this article in brochure format and since it is within the public domain may be reproduced without formal permission.

Anxiety Disorders

People with anxiety disorders feel extremely fearful and unsure. Most people feel anxious about something for a short time now and again, but people with anxiety disorders feel this way most of the time. Their fears and worries make it hard for them to do everyday tasks. About 18% of American adults have anxiety disorders. Children also may have them.

Treatment is available for people with anxiety disorders. Researchers are also looking for new treatments that will help relieve symptoms.

This booklet is about one kind of anxiety disorder called generalized anxiety disorder, or GAD. For information about other kinds of anxiety disorders, please see the end of this booklet.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

All of us worry about things like health, money, or family problems at one time or another. But people with GAD are extremely worried about these and many other things, even when there is little or no reason to worry about them. They may be very anxious about just

getting through the day. They think things will always go badly. At times, worrying keeps people with GAD from doing everyday tasks.

This is a list of common symptoms. People with GAD:

- **Worry very much about everyday things for at least six months even if there is little or no reason to worry about them;**
- **can't control their constant worries;**
- **know that they worry much more than they should;**
- **can't relax;**
- **have a hard time concentrating;**
- **are easily startled; and**
- **have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.**

Common body symptoms are:

- **feeling tired for no reason;**
- **headaches;**
- **muscle tension and aches;**
- **having a hard time swallowing;**
- **trembling or twitching;**
- **being irritable;**
- **sweating;**
- **nausea;**
- **feeling lightheaded;**
- **feeling out of breath;**
- **having to go to the bathroom a lot; and**
- **hot flashes.**

When does GAD start?

GAD develops slowly. It often starts during the time between childhood and middle age. Symptoms may get better or worse at different times, and often are worse during times of stress.

People with GAD may visit a doctor many times before they find out they have this disorder. They ask their doctors to help them with the signs of GAD, such as headaches or trouble falling asleep, but don't always get the help they need right away. It may take doctors some time to be sure that a person has GAD instead of something else.

Is there help?

There is help for people with GAD. The first step is to go to a doctor or health clinic to talk about symptoms. People who think they have GAD may want to bring this booklet to the doctor to help them talk about the symptoms in it. The doctor will do an exam to make sure that another physical problem isn't causing the symptoms. The doctor may make a referral to a mental health specialist.

Doctors may prescribe medication to help relieve GAD. It's important to know that some of these medicines may take a few weeks to start working. In most states only a medical doctor (a family doctor or psychiatrist) can prescribe medications.

The kinds of medicines used to treat GAD are listed below. Some are used to treat other problems, such as depression, but also are helpful for GAD:

- **antidepressants,**
- **anti-anxiety medicines, and**
- **beta blockers.**

Doctors also may ask people with GAD to go to therapy with a licensed social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. This treatment can help people with GAD feel less anxious and fearful.

There is no cure for GAD yet, but treatments can give relief to people who have it and help them live a more normal life. If you know someone with signs of GAD, talk to him or her about seeing a doctor. Offer to go along for support. To find out more about GAD, call 1-866-615-NIMH (1-866-615-6464) to have free information mailed to you.

Who pays for treatment?

Most insurance plans cover treatment for anxiety disorders. People who are going to have treatment should check with their own insurance companies to find out about coverage. For people who don't have insurance, local city or county governments may offer treatment at a clinic or health center, where the cost is based on income. Medicaid plans also may pay for GAD treatment.

Why do people get GAD?

GAD sometimes runs in families, but no one knows for sure why some people have it, while others don't. When chemicals in the brain are not at a certain level it can cause a person to have GAD. That is why medications often help with the symptoms because they help the brain chemicals stay at the correct levels.

To improve treatment, scientists are studying how well different medicines and therapies work. In one kind of research, people with GAD choose to take part in a clinical trial to help doctors find out what treatments work best for most people, or what works best for different symptoms. Usually, the treatment is free. Scientists are learning more about how the brain works so that they can discover new treatments.

Personal story

"I was worried all the time about everything. It didn't matter that there were no signs of problems, I just got upset. I was having trouble falling asleep at night, and I couldn't keep my mind focused at work. I felt angry at my family all the time.

"I saw my doctor and explained my constant worries. My doctor sent me to someone who knows about GAD. Now I am taking medicine and working with a counselor to cope better with my worries. I had to work hard, but I feel better. I'm glad I made that first call to my doctor."

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don't have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. We will assess what problems you are having and connect you with the most helpful resources. Using EAP won't cost you anything and you have nothing to lose except the problem.

(813) 870-0392 or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).

For More Information

Visit the National Library of Medicine's [MedlinePlus](#) and [En Español](#)

For Information on Clinical Trials for GAD and Other Anxiety Disorders

Information from NIMH is available in multiple formats. You can browse online, download documents in PDF, and order paper

brochures by mail. You can order NIMH publications online at www.nimh.nih.gov.

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**NIH Publication No. 07-4677
Revised 2007**

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander

is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.

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