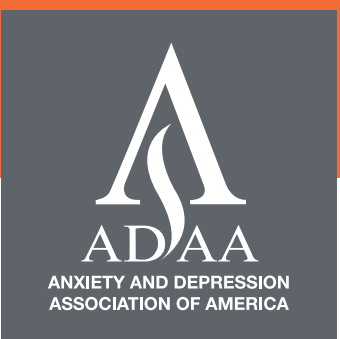


# Generalized Anxiety Disorder



# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Relationships, health, money, deadlines, traffic, world affairs, climate change, arriving on time to work or an appointment — you name it. We all have plenty to worry about. But people who have generalized anxiety disorder, or GAD, experience persistent, excessive, and unrelenting worry that goes on every day, most of the day.

Those with GAD don't know how to stop the worry cycle, which they feel is beyond their control, and it interferes with daily living. They often expect the worst, and they worry disproportionately about real concerns. Physical ailments often accompany the worrying: muscle tension, fatigue, irritability, gastrointestinal symptoms, and headaches. Many people experience having repetitive circular internal dialogues between their anxious mind and their rational mind that interfere with sleep and enjoyment of life. Others repeatedly seek reassurance.

GAD affects men and women, and it can begin at any time. No laboratory tests exist to specifically diagnose this or another anxiety disorder. A mental health provider diagnosing GAD asks questions about your medical history. He or she will try to determine if your symptoms are part of another mental disorder or due to a substance or medical issue.

GAD is diagnosed if you've worried chronically on more days than not about a variety of everyday problems for at least six months. A diagnosis of GAD is determined if chronic worrying interferes with daily living, such as causing you to miss work or school or causes significant mental distress. Further, if you have a very difficult struggle to regain control, relax, or manage anxiety and worry, that usually indicates GAD.

GAD is also diagnosed if for most days over the previous six months you have experienced three or more of these symptoms that cause clinically significant distress:

- ▶ Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
- ▶ Being easily fatigued
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Muscle tension
- ▶ Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless, unsatisfying sleep)



## ANXIETY AND GAD

In addition to GAD, the term “anxiety disorder” includes panic disorder and panic attacks, agoraphobia, social anxiety disorder, selective mutism, separation anxiety, and specific phobias.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are closely related to anxiety disorders; anxiety is one of the symptoms. Some people may experience either of these disorders along with depression and other related disorders at the same time.

Each disorder has specific symptoms. For more details, visit the ADAA website at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

Unrelenting worry  
physical ailments  
struggle  
chronic anxiety  
distress

## NORMAL ANXIETY VS. GAD

An important part of living, anxiety is a normal emotional reaction to stress, which is a biological response to a threat. Anxiety helps us get out of harm's way and prepare for important events, and it warns us when we need to take action.

When anxiety is persistent, excessive, seemingly uncontrollable, overwhelming, and disabling or when it interferes with daily activities, you may have an anxiety disorder.



NORMAL ANXIETY	GAD
Muscle aches or tiredness related overexertion at the gym, a stressful day at work, or sitting too long at the computer	Restlessness, muscle tension, and fatigue that persist for six months or more not related to a specific physical or emotional problem
Worry about a work deadline, school exam, or upcoming medical appointment	Constant and chronic worry that disrupts social activities and interferes with work, school, family, and relationships
Difficulty relaxing, sleeping, or concentrating when faced with an illness, job loss, or relationship difficulties	Irritability, sleep disturbance, or difficulty concentrating on more days than not for at least six months

## EFFECTS

When worrying goes on every day, possibly all day, generalized anxiety disorder can disrupt social activities and interfere with work, school, family, relationships, and your general sense of well-being. GAD is also a risk factor for depression; these two disorders frequently occur together.

According to a national survey conducted by ADAA, seven out of 10 people with GAD agreed that their chronic anxiety had an impact on their relationships with spouses and significant others and two-thirds reported that GAD had a negative effect on their friendships.

## CAUSES

Although the precise cause of GAD is unknown, scientific studies show that a combination of biological, genetic, cognitive, and environmental factors (stress, negative life events) play a role in GAD. Even the stress of positive events, such as buying a new house or getting married, can trigger symptoms in those who are predisposed to this disorder.

## TREATMENT

Most people who seek treatment for GAD see significant improvement and enjoy a better quality of life. Treatment is individualized, but standard approaches have proved effective.

A variety of treatment options are scientifically proven to be effective. These evidence-based treatments include psychotherapy such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). This short-term treatment actively involves you in learning skills to help change your thinking and behavior patterns. It teaches you how to control your worry, decrease the impact of anxiety on your life, and learn new responses to stressful events, often within 12 to 16 weeks. In addition, medications such as benzodiazepines and SSRIs may be prescribed. One or a combination of treatments may be recommended.

overwhelming

Disabling

persistent

Effects  
Causes

Treatment



Relaxation and breathing techniques, meditation, yoga, and exercise may also become part of your treatment plan.

Learn about effective treatments on the ADAA website at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

There is no single “right” treatment. What works for one person may not be the best choice for you. Ask your treatment provider for an explanation of why a particular type of treatment is recommended, other available options, and what you must do to fully participate in your recovery.

## MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY

Whether you have normal anxiety, GAD, or another anxiety disorder, these strategies will help you cope:

- ▶ Talk to someone: spouse, significant other, friend, child or doctor.
- ▶ Exercise: Go for a walk, jog, do yoga, dance, or just get moving!
- ▶ Keep a daily journal. Become aware of what triggers your anxiety.
- ▶ Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals. Avoid caffeine, which can trigger anxiety symptoms.
- ▶ Contact ADAA at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org): Let us help you help yourself.

## GETTING HELP

Suffering from GAD can interfere with many aspects of your life. Visit ADAA at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) to find qualified mental health professionals using the *Find a Therapist* directory.

ADAA also provides resources and connections to help you and your loved ones better understand anxiety disorders and depression. Look over the questions to ask a mental health provider as you explore treatment, find resources and books, and locate support groups in your area.

ADAA serves as a comprehensive resource for education about the causes, symptoms, and treatments of anxiety, depression, and related disorders. We are here to help you find answers and make the best decisions for your health care so you can move forward with your life.



## HELP ADAA HELP OTHERS.

You can make a difference by helping ADAA expand its efforts to reach those with anxiety disorders, depression, OCD, PTSD, and related disorders. Your contribution supports ADAA's efforts to increase awareness and provide education that improves the lives of all people who suffer from anxiety or depression. Your donation also supports research and allows ADAA to advocate for improved treatments and access to care.

Donate *online* at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org),  
on the *phone* (240-485-1001),  
or by *mail* to ADAA,  
8701 Georgia Avenue, Suite 412  
Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Let us help  
[www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) you find  
treatment.

All donations are tax-deductible.

# About ADAA

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, OCD, PTSD, depression, and related disorders and to improve the lives of all people who suffer from them.

**Help ADAA help others. Please donate at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).**

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For more information visit [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) or contact

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