

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

"I just dread being alone at night. I don't know why, but I do....."

"My thoughts won't shut off. They're constantly running, making me worry, worry, worry....."

"Will I ever be my old self again??"

Generalized anxiety disorder is a relatively common anxiety problem, affecting 3-4% of the population that turns daily life into a state of worry, anxiety, and fear. Excessive thinking and dwelling on the "what ifs" characterizes this anxiety disorder. As a result, the person feels there's no way out of the vicious cycle of anxiety and worry, and then becomes depressed about life and the state of anxiety they find themselves in.

Signs and symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder:

Several of the following symptoms have occurred for at least 6 months:

- anxious feelings
- feeling of dread
- lack of energy
- loss of interest in things once enjoyed
- endless checking and re-checking actions
- irritability
- sleep disruption
- difficulty concentrating
- muscle tension

Generalized anxiety usually does not cause people to avoid situations, and there isn't an element of a "panic attack" involved in the prognosis, either. It's the *thinking, thinking, thinking, dwelling, dwelling, ruminating, ruminating, and inability to shut the mind off that so incapacitates the person.* At other times, thoughts seem almost non-existent because the anxious feelings are

so dominant. Feelings of worry, dread, lack of energy, and a loss of interest in life are common. Many times there is no "trigger" or "cause" for these feelings and the person realizes these feelings are irrational. Nevertheless, the feelings are very real. At this point, there is no "energy" or "zest" in life and no desire to want to do much.

This emotional fear and worry can be quite strong. If a loved one is ten minutes late, the person with generalized anxiety fears the very worst -- something's dreadfully wrong (after all, they're ten minutes late!), there's been an accident, the paramedics are taking the person to the hospital and his injuries are just too critical to resuscitate him....."Oh, my God!.....WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?" Feelings of fear and anxiety rush in from these thoughts, and the vicious cycle of anxiety and depression runs wild.

Some people with generalized anxiety have fluctuations in mood from hour to hour, whereas others have "good days" and "bad days". Others do better in the morning, and others find it easier at the end of the day. Physical symptoms of generalized anxiety may include headaches, trembling, irritability, frustration, and inability to concentrate. Sleep disturbances may also occur.

It is also common for people with generalized anxiety to experience other problems, such as being easily startled, a lack of ability to fully relax, and the propensity to be in a state of constant motion. It is difficult for some people with generalized anxiety to settle down enough to have a quiet, reflective time where they can calm down, relax, and feel some peace and tranquility.

Normal life stresses aggravate generalized anxiety. The person who typically performs well at work and receives a sense of accomplishment from it, all of a sudden finds that work has become drudgery.

If you feel that you have signs and symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, please contact your family physician or see a therapist. Often, a person is prescribed anti-anxiety medication while they are in therapy to discover the root of their problem. Sometimes, therapy alone can be the answer; however, it is always a good idea to have a complete physical examination to determine whether or not there is a physical problem.

For more information about generalized anxiety disorder, visit:

<http://www.anxietynetwork.com/gahome.html>

<http://www.aafp.org/afp/20001001/1591.html>

<http://help-for.com/gad-gs.htm?gclid=CJu-9OzNnoYCFQygWAodBB5Uuw>