Do I Have Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

by ERIC PATTERSON

How to Know If You Have Generalized Anxiety Disorder

There is a lot to worry about during a day: paying bills, getting work done and turned in on time, health of loved ones. Sometimes, you even worry about how much you worry.

It can be difficult to know how much worry is too much. All people worry, and some amount of worry is related to improved levels of mental focus and physical performance.

That means some nervousness is good, but too much worry leads to unwanted consequences. It reduces the quality of life as more of your energy is devoted to worrying.

How much is too much? Where is the line?

When levels of worry begin to cross the line into anxiety, it is important to know what you are up against because there are many types of anxiety disorders. Each one has its own set of symptoms and criteria as set by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a book published by the American Psychiatric Association.

Symptoms of GAD

One of the more common anxiety disorders is called generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). GAD currently affects about 7 million Americans, with about nine percent of Americans likely to have the disorder at some point during their life.

Since there is no test to indicate you have GAD, a mental health professional will ask you a series of questions about your life, your past experiences, and current symptoms to decide if you meet the criteria for a diagnosis.

Do You Meet the Criteria?

The mental health professional will look for six separate aspects of your functioning:

Does excessive worry occur more often than not for six months or more? Do you worry about multiple items like school, work, relationships, money, appearance or only one thing?

Do you find it challenging to control, reduce, or manage the worry? Do you have three or more of the following symptoms?

- Restlessness or feeling on edge
- Easily tired and worn down
- Trouble paying attention or having your mind go blank

- Irritable or easily annoyed
- Tense or rigid
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early

Do the above symptoms create major problems in your life by affecting your work or social life?

Are these symptoms better explained by another influence like a drug or medical condition? Other substances that can trigger anxious symptoms include:

- Caffeine
- Methamphetamine/crystal meth
- Stimulant medications (like those used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)

Are these symptoms better explained by another mental health condition? Many disorders can be confused with GAD:

- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Social anxiety disorder
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Depressive disorders
- Bipolar disorders

The primary issue with GAD will be the excessive worry, anxiety, and fear that persists for a long period without being proportionally related to the situation you are worrying about.

Next page: additional signs of generalized anxiety disorder.

Additional Signs

Sometimes, people with GAD will have symptoms that further support the diagnosis. Although these are not officially part of the criteria, they help to reassure that GAD is the appropriate diagnosis. These symptoms include:

- Sweating
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Headaches
- Being easily startled

Other symptoms that are associated with anxiety but **NOT** GAD include:

- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Quicker heart rate

These physical effects might be more related to a phobia or panic disorder rather than GAD.

GAD Facts

- Females are twice as likely to be diagnosed with GAD
- People of European descent have GAD more frequently than people with ancestral connections to other parts of the world
- GAD can be diagnosed across someone’s lifespan, with 30 being the average age of onset
- Adults with GAD commonly worried excessively as children

- Younger adults with GAD tend to have symptoms more severe than older adults with GAD

The Next Step

Before you tell yourself your condition does not warrant treatment, consider the idea that many people who could benefit from mental health treatment do not seek it because they do not believe their symptoms deserve such action.

This could be an enormous error, because conditions like generalized anxiety disorder rarely get better on their own. Instead, the condition is known to have periods of relapse and recovery where symptoms will diminish only to return later.

Some people become fooled into thinking that they are “cured” and avoid treatment when symptoms improve, only to be surprised when they return later.

If you believe you might have the condition, seek an evaluation from a professional.

This assessment can provide a better understanding of your mental health and the true impact it has on your life. Also, it can provide you with possible treatment options like:

- Counseling, including cognitive behavioral therapy
- Medication management with drugs proven to reduce unwanted symptoms
- Lifestyle changes like improved diet, exercise routines, and identifying anxiety triggers to diminish your stress

The worst decision is the choice to do nothing. GAD is very treatable with practical solutions.

Generalized anxiety disorder can be challenging to differentiate from normal, healthy worry. By investigating the symptoms and criteria established by the American Psychiatric Association, you can begin to assess your individual status.

If the signs are pointing towards the diagnosis, seek out the professional opinion of a respected mental health specialist. With proper acknowledgment of the condition and minor modifications, GAD can be G-O-N-E.