



Generalized Anxiety Disorder

A person with extreme fear and worry may have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). GAD is chronic and long-lasting. It may occur at any time. The fear and anxiety felt by a person with GAD is very real. It can be quite harmful to a person.

People with GAD may not feel extreme worry all of the time. But their anxiety is almost always there. This may lead to bad physical effects. These can include a fast heart rate, nausea and dizziness. There may be tense muscles and sweating. A person may have bad moods. In severe cases, GAD can make it hard to do daily activities.

GAD affects women more than men. It can occur with other anxiety disorders. These include panic disorders or phobias. Or it can occur by itself. But unlike those illnesses, the anxiety of GAD doesn't focus on one event or thing. It is a fear of many things.

GAD is the hardest anxiety disorders to identify. With panic disorders or phobias, the cause is clear. But in GAD, there is no single source of fear. Family members and even doctors may think the symptoms are just part of someone's personality. The person could be prone to worry or stress. Because of this, many people with GAD don't know it. They suffer even though help may be easy to get.

Symptoms

Common symptoms of GAD include:

- Extreme worry.
- Bad moods.
- Being tired.
- Having sleep problems,
- Being restless.
- Trembles or a fast heart rate.
- Feeling dizzy.
- Feeling light-headed.
- Cold, clammy hands.
- Sweating.
- Nausea.
- Dry mouth.
- Hot flashes or chills.
- Trouble focusing.
- Muscle tension and aches.

Diagnosis

People with other anxiety disorders may have some of these symptoms. Before saying an illness is GAD, health providers must rule out other mental health conditions. Plus, the symptoms must be present most days for at least six months for it to be GAD. A complete medical exam is needed.

Some medical conditions also have symptoms like those of GAD. These include thyroid disorders and side effects from medicine. Medical conditions need to be ruled out as the cause too. Then, therapy can provide helpful treatment.

Treatment

Learning why a person with has stress is the first step in treatment. This help a therapist suggest ways for them to handle it. This may also help the person cope better in everyday life.

Helping someone learn to relax or meditate often helps too. It helps a person with GAD start to feel more in control. Therapy helps a person learn how to do this. It helps a person with GAD change how they think about things.

Medicine may be needed in some cases. Anti-anxiety drugs may help. Antidepressant drugs are used too. Most people take these drugs for just a short time. This helps bring a person's anxiety down. The drugs are often stopped once a person learns to cope with GAD through therapy.

To learn more:

Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

www.adaa.org.

Freedom From Fear.

www.freedomfromfear.org.

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