



ANXIETY DISORDER, GENERALIZED



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An illness that involves constant worry, even though nothing is wrong. A person feels tense most of the time and always expects the worst to happen. They may worry about health, money, family, work, or, sometimes, an unknown or unspecified threat. The symptoms may be severe and interfere with daily living. Attempts to avoid the anxiety lead to more anxiety. Anxiety usually comes on slowly and can start in childhood, adolescence, or as an adult. It is more common in women.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Feeling that something undesirable or harmful is about to happen.
- Constant worry about things (big and small).
- Aches and pains for unknown reasons.
- Feeling tired.
- Unable to relax.
- Muscle tension; headaches; backache.
- Trouble falling or staying asleep.
- Dry mouth, swallowing difficulty or hoarseness.
- Twitching or trembling.
- Unable to focus or concentrate.
- Feeling irritable or grouchy.
- Nausea; diarrhea; weight loss.
- Sweating or hot flashes.
- Easily startled.

CAUSES

It is most likely a combination of hereditary factors, environmental factors (such as childhood experiences), and chemical disturbances in the brain.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Women.
- Stressful events or crisis in one's life.
- Family history of anxiety disorders.
- Other emotional or mental illness (depression, panic disorder, phobias, or dysthymia).
- Alcohol or substance abuse.
- Lack of social connections.
- Certain personality factors (being shy or a worrier).
- Living in poverty, in a minority group, or as an immigrant.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There are no specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Anxiety can be controlled with treatment. Overcoming anxiety often results in a richer, more satisfying life.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Impaired social and work functioning.
- Depression, panic disorder, or social phobia.
- Dependence on drugs or alcohol.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms. A mental health test may be done. There is no specific test to diagnose anxiety. Medical tests may be done to rule out other medical disorders.
- Treatment may involve psychotherapy (treatment of emotional and mental problems), self-care, and drugs.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is often recommended. The cognitive aspect teaches how to change thoughts, behaviors, or attitudes. The behavioral element teaches ways to reduce anxiety with deep breathing and muscle relaxation.
- Self-care steps may include:

Talking to a friend or family member about your feelings. This sometimes defuses your anxiety.

Keep a journal about your anxious thoughts or emotions. Consider the causes and possible solutions.

Join a self-help group.

Learn relaxation techniques. For some people, meditation is effective.

Reduce stress in your life where possible.

- To learn more: National Institute of Mental Health; 6001 Executive Blvd, Bethesda, MD 20892-9663; (800) 647-2642; website: www.nimh.nih.gov.

MEDICATIONS

- Antianxiety drugs may be prescribed.
- Antidepressants may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Stay active. Physical exertion helps reduce anxiety.

DIET

No special diet. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of anxiety.
- Symptoms recur after treatment.