

# What Is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)?

You feel worried, and unable to control your worries.

You feel anxious, nervous, or restless.

You feel unable to relax or sleep.

Your muscles feel tense, ache, or are painful.

**It's common to worry sometimes, but if you worry too much it can feel exhausting and may affect your health.**

Psychologists call this generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), and they think that between 2 and 6 people out of every 100 experience GAD every year.

## The core of generalized anxiety: worry

When you worry, you think about problems that might happen in a way that leaves you feeling anxious or nervous. Worry is a chain of thoughts and images that can progress in ever more catastrophic and unlikely directions. It often feels hard to control and seems to take on a life of its own.



## Worry can get stuck in place for a few reasons:

### Intolerance of uncertainty

If you find uncertainty unpleasant, you might do more:

- Worrying, in an attempt to anticipate problems.
- Planning in advance, how you might deal with difficulties
- Checking and researching, to find out as much as you can.

Strategies designed to help you to 'feel certain' such as worrying and planning can backfire: for every "what if ...?" question there are many uncertain answers, which leaves you feeling even less certain.

### Positive beliefs about worry

Positive beliefs about worry include:

- "Worrying helps me to find solutions to problems."
- "Worrying increases my motivation to get things done."
- "Worrying in advance helps me cope if something bad happens."
- "Worrying can prevent bad things from happening."

Unsurprisingly, people who hold positive beliefs about worry tend to do more worrying.

### Avoidance

Anxiety doesn't feel good, and so you might try to avoid particular thoughts and feelings by:

- Suppressing worrisome thoughts.
- Using distractions to interrupt worry.
- Avoiding situations that cause worry.

Avoidance strategies are physically and mentally tiring. Avoiding or suppressing your thoughts can actually result in experiencing even more of the things that you are trying to suppress.

## Treatment for generalized anxiety

Two psychological treatments for GAD, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and applied relaxation are well supported by evidence.

The UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that if you have GAD and choose drug treatment, you should be offered a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) at first, or a serotonin-noradrenaline reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) if SSRIs are ineffective.