

Fact Sheet: Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Description and incidence: Of the 40 million Americans age 18 and older who suffer from an anxiety disorder, approximately 3.1%, or 6.8 million, suffer from Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). The essential characteristic of GAD is excessive uncontrollable worry about everyday things. This constant worry affects daily functioning and can cause physical symptoms. GAD can occur with other anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, or substance abuse.

The focus of GAD worry can shift, but usually centers on issues like career, finances, and the health of both self and family. It can also include more mundane issues such as chores, car repairs, and being late for appointments. The intensity, duration, and frequency of the worry are disproportionate to the issue and interfere with the sufferer's performance of tasks and ability to concentrate. Sufferers tend to be irritable and complain about feeling on edge, are easily tired, and have trouble sleeping.

Physical symptoms of GAD include:

- ◆ muscle tension
- ◆ sweating
- ◆ nausea
- ◆ gastrointestinal discomfort or diarrhea
- ◆ cold, clammy hands
- ◆ difficulty swallowing
- ◆ jumpiness

Diagnosis: GAD is often difficult to diagnose because it lacks some of the dramatic symptoms, such as unprovoked panic attacks, that are seen with other anxiety disorders. For a diagnosis to be made, excessive, persistent worry must be present more days than not for at least 6 months.