



Generalized Anxiety Disorder



葵涌醫院
KWAI CHUNG
HOSPITAL



醫院管理局
HOSPITAL
AUTHORITY

Publishing : Kwai Chung Hospital
Address : 3-15, Kwai Chung Hospital Road,
New Territories
Phone : 2959-8111
Fax : 2745-7610
Website : www.ha.org.hk/kch

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What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)?

GAD is a type of anxiety disorder characterized by excessive, and often irrational worry about everyday matters such as job, the health of themselves and their family, finances, etc. The worry is often uncontrollable, thus causing a person to be unable to wind down, and resulting in a variety of physical symptoms including fatigue, fidgeting, difficulty concentrating, irritability, insomnia, and so forth.

What are the causes of GAD?

There is no single cause of GAD, but researchers have identified a number of risk factors. These factors differ for each individual person :

- Biological factors
Heredity, chemical imbalances of neurotransmitters, poor physical health
- Psychological factors
People who are anxiety-prone, insecure, pessimistic, and passive
- Environmental factors
Negative childhood experiences, and other stressful events in life such as change of employment, relationship problems, etc.

How do I know if I have GAD?

It is normal to feel temporarily tense, anxious or worried when facing problems at work, and with friends and family. However, if your worries and fears persist for 6 months or above, together with 3 of the following symptoms, and become so constant that they interfere with your ability to work, socialize, and relax, you may have GAD. You should seek help from health care professionals.

1. Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
2. Easily fatigued
3. Difficulty concentrating, or mind going blank
4. Irritability
5. Muscle tension
6. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling asleep or restless sleep)

What is the course of GAD?

Many persons with GAD tend to have anxious personalities. Indeed, a portion of these people cannot precisely tell when their disorder firstly emerged. The course of the disorder is related to the stressors experienced in life. Generally speaking, the longer one suffers from GAD, the longer it takes to recover. Apart from that, their chances of having depression or other anxiety disorders are also higher than that of the general population.

What are the treatments for GAD?

1. Psychotherapy

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is an effective treatment for GAD. It helps to replace maladaptive reactions in the domains of cognition, behaviour, and physiology, with adaptive coping responses. Cognitively, the main focus is to replace irrational and catastrophic thoughts with more balanced ones; behaviourally, individuals would acquire skills in time management, goal setting, and problem-solving to help decreasing anxiety; and physiologically, individuals would do relaxation exercises to decrease their stress reaction.

2. Pharmacological Treatment

To help alleviate symptoms of GAD, antidepressants, tranquillizers, or norepinephrine blockers will be prescribed if necessary. Individuals should take medication as instructed by doctors. Long-term use of tranquillizers should be minimized to avoid addiction and other side effects.

How can I help myself or others to manage GAD?

1. For individuals with GAD

- Actively seek treatment and participate in the process
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle: eat a healthy and balanced diet, exercise regularly and moderately, have a structured schedule, cultivate meaningful hobbies, maintain social contacts. Make a commitment to face your difficulties courageously
- Do relaxation exercises regularly to relieve symptoms of anxiety

2. For family members of individuals with GAD

- Understand the symptoms of GAD and its causes. Avoid blaming the individual for having GAD, and allow time for the individual to recover
- Encourage the individual to actively participate in treatment and other recreational activities
- Should conditions worsen, help from health care professionals should be sought as soon as possible.