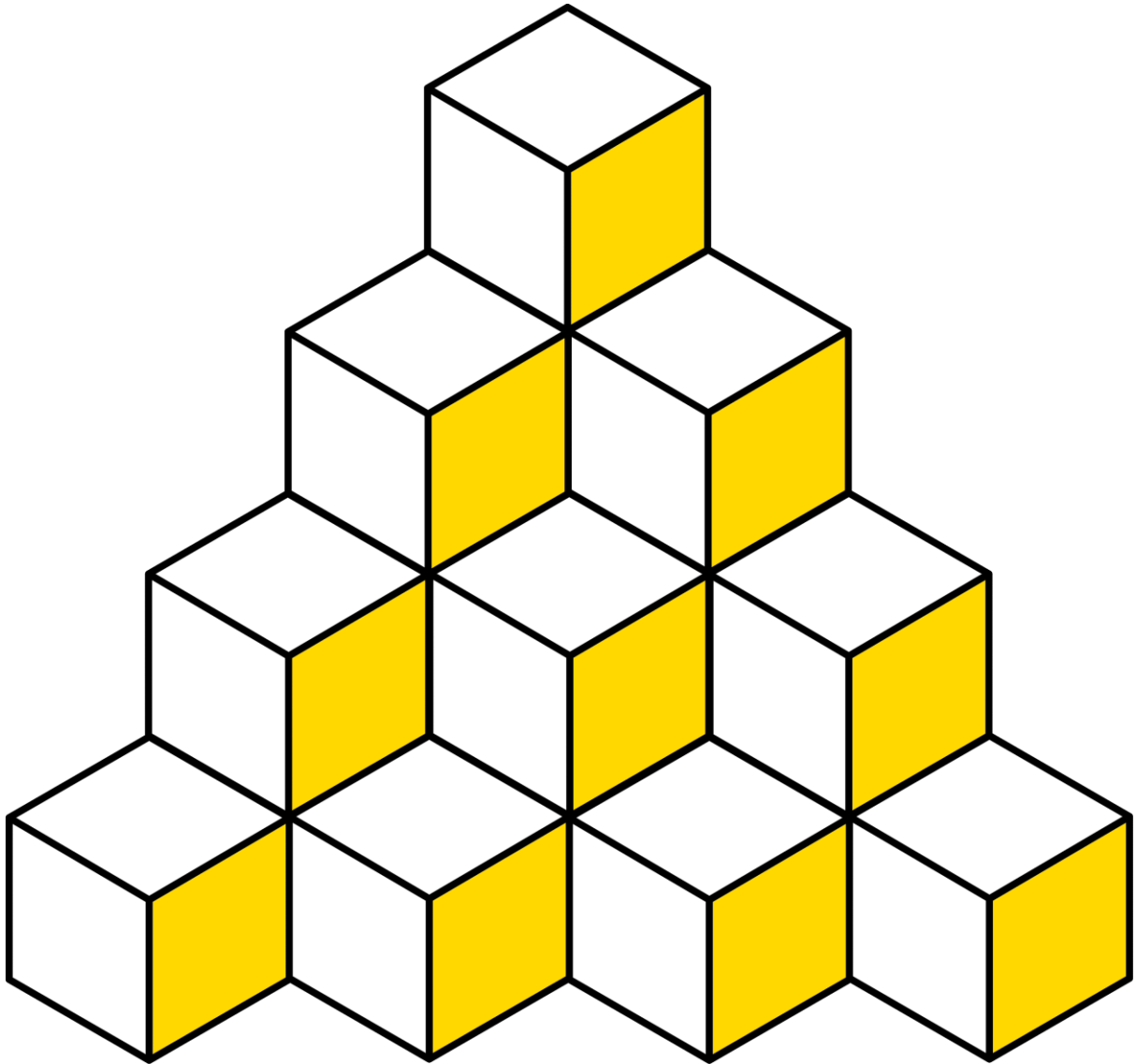


GENERALISED ANXIETY



INFORMATION SHEET

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What is Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)?



Generalised anxiety (GAD) is the most common anxiety disorder - about 4% of the population feel anxious, worried or fearful for much of the time. People with GAD worry so much it interferes with their life. They find it hard to relax, hard to sleep and may feel mentally and physically exhausted from worrying so much.

About anxiety disorders

Feeling nervous when confronted by an aggressive person will make most of us feel a little scared. Anxiety is different - we feel anxious when there's no real danger or threat. The feelings in the body are very similar, but feelings of anxiety are prolonged or are out of proportion to the threat we face.

Sometimes we can become so anxious that we start avoiding things. Some people develop a phobia or have to perform certain rituals such as counting or cleaning, which can stop them getting on with day-to-day life.

When fear is **very intense**, when it **goes on for too long** or when it **stops us getting on with life**, we may have an anxiety disorder.

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There are a number of different anxiety disorders. They include:

- Panic disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder
- Social anxiety
- Phobias

In this information sheet we will be looking at **Generalised Anxiety Disorder**, also known as **GAD**.

Symptoms of GAD

The main symptom of GAD is excessive worry. Worry preoccupies the person, and interferes with their daily life. The worry can be hard to control. People with GAD may be very concerned with everyday issues such as:

- Health
- Money
- Work
- Accidents or injuries
- Family or relationship problems

People with GAD often anticipate disaster. They become preoccupied with the very worst thing that might happen, even when it's very unlikely (a process called *catastrophising*). If a partner is late, a person with GAD may jump to the conclusion that they've been in an accident, rather than the more likely explanation that they have been held up in traffic. Sometimes people have a

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lot of anxiety symptoms but find it hard to identify anything specific they're anxious about.

When GAD goes on for a long time we can become exhausted. We might find everyday activities like going to work or to the shops too much to bear, so we stay in and avoid people. Some people might smoke or drink too much, or take illegal drugs to find relief.

A lowering of sex-drive with GAD is to be expected. GAD can also lower our immune system, making us more susceptible to coughs and colds.

What causes GAD?

We don't know for sure, but it's likely to be a combination of things. Our genes, our experiences and our outlook on life all play a part.

It seems that GAD is linked to the functioning of a part of the brain called the **amygdala**, which has an important role to play in the processing of fear and anxiety.

Sometimes GAD is triggered by things that happen to us, which might be stress or a trauma of some kind. Some people seem to be more prone to GAD than others, with women being twice as likely as men to seek help for GAD.

Long term drug or alcohol use has been associated with the development of GAD, as has smoking and excessive consumption of caffeinated or high-sugar beverages such as tea, coffee and stimulant drinks.

Diagnosing GAD



We all worry, more so when we're under stress. Diagnosis is often a matter of degree – recognising when worry becomes such a problem that it requires treatment. GAD can only be diagnosed after symptoms have been present for more than half of each day and for more than six months.

Some medical problems can cause similar symptoms to GAD, as can illegal drug use. Other anxiety problems such as panic disorder, phobias or health anxiety can sometimes be confused with GAD. Other possible causes must be ruled out before GAD can be diagnosed.

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), a guide to diagnosis, says that a period of 'at least six months with prominent tension, worry and feelings of apprehension about everyday events and problems' must have passed before diagnosis, and that at least four symptoms from the following list must be present, at least one of which must come from items numbered '1' to '4' (below).

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Autonomic arousal symptoms

- 01. Palpitations, fast or pounding heart
- 02. Sweating
- 03. Shaking or trembling
- 04. Dry mouth (not because of dehydration or medication side effects)

Chest and abdomen

- 05. Difficulty breathing
- 06. Choking feelings
- 07. Chest pain or discomfort
- 08. Nausea or abdominal distress (e.g. 'churning' stomach)

Brain and mind

- 09. Feeling dizzy, unsteady, faint or light-headed
- 10. Feelings that objects aren't real (*derealisation*), or feeling distant or somehow 'not really here' (*depersonalisation*)
- 11. Fear of losing control, going crazy or losing consciousness
- 12. Fear of dying

General symptoms

- 13. Hot flushes or cold chills
- 14. Numbness or tingling sensations

Tension

- 15. Muscle tension or aches and pains
- 16. Restlessness and inability to relax
- 17. Feeling 'keyed up', 'on edge' or of mental tension
- 18. A sensation of a lump in the throat, or difficulty swallowing

Other symptoms

- 19. Exaggerated response to minor surprises or being startled
- 20. Difficulty concentrating, mind going blank due to worry or anxiety
- 21. Persistent irritability
- 22. Difficulty getting to sleep due to worry

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Might I have GAD?

As a quick check if you might have GAD, have a look at these two questions.

They are from a questionnaire called the GAD-2.

Over the **last two weeks**, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge?	0	1	2	3
Not being able to stop or control worrying?	0	1	2	3
My total				

Add up your scores for the two questions. Your score will be between zero and six. If your score is three or more, you might have generalised anxiety and you should complete our more in-depth anxiety assessment, the GAD-7.

If you score less than three on the GAD-2 scale but still think you may have a problem with anxiety, ask yourself:

‘Do I find myself avoiding things and does this cause me problems?’

If you answer ‘yes’ to this question you might want to discuss the issue further with a health professional.

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These questions won't give you a diagnosis – that's something only a qualified health professional can do – but it will give you a better idea about your symptoms.

Recovery from GAD

Talking therapies (counselling or psychotherapy) and anxiolytics (anti-anxiety medication) can be very helpful and are usually accessed through your GP.

Mindfulness and other forms of meditation can help too. Some antidepressants have an anti-anxiety effect, so don't be surprised if you are prescribed an anti-depressant medication by your GP. It's also very common for low mood and anxiety to occur together (*mixed anxiety and depression*).

There are many approaches to the treatment of anxiety. If at first you find one doesn't work, try different approaches until you find one that you feel comfortable with and that works for you, though make sure to give each one a fair time to work.

GAD often responds especially well to cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT). CBT is an active therapy that involves changing feelings and emotions through learning to see challenges in a different way. In CBT, you may be encouraged to try out new behaviours in different situations (*behavioural experiments*).

Medication can be taken alongside therapy, though it's not recommended for everyone.

The vast majority of people with GAD are treated by their GP. Often, medication won't be your prescriber's first choice as CBT can be just as effective as tablets.

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If you are prescribed antidepressants, they can take several weeks to work so don't give up hope if you don't feel better straight away. Sometimes they work best when taken for a longer time. They shouldn't be stopped suddenly without medical advice.

The first appointment with your GP can feel difficult, especially if you view GAD as a 'weakness' (it isn't!) so it might be helpful to write down what you want to talk about before you go. Make a note of any questions or worries you might have. Some people find it helpful to take a friend or family member along.

Anxiety disorders can make us feel alone and helpless, and it can be hard to summon the energy to get help. A quick 'phone call to your GP can get things moving and start you on the road to recovery.

Recovery from GAD can be hard work, though a complete recovery is possible for many people.

Things that can help you recover

Acting opposite

Anxiety can make us want to avoid people or situations. It can be very hard, but facing our fears and staying with people can be very helpful. Remaining in work or returning to work might be very hard too, but can help us keep a sense of control. Keeping a normal daily routine is usually much better than withdrawing. We might feel like shutting ourselves away, but doing so can make things worse.

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When we avoid a situation, it's harder to gain control over our fear. Ask yourself, 'if I were to act opposite to how I feel, what would I do'? Make a note of your answer below.

Talking therapies

There are many different types of talking therapy; the most effective for GAD is probably cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT). In CBT, we learn to face our fears and the ways in which our thoughts can make us more anxious and less able to cope. Your CBT therapist will help you learn new skills to deal with anxiety and help support you face up to things you may have avoided.

Other treatments are available for GAD, such as mindfulness, analytic therapies or counselling, which many people find helpful. Ask your health professional for advice, or choose a therapy that feels right and that works for you.

Dealing with things

Putting off problems can make them mount up. Are there things in your life you're putting off dealing with? Might an advocate or some extra support help? The Citizens Advice Bureau can help with a range of issues from housing

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to money worries. Doing things to address our problems helps relieve the burden and allows us to feel 'in control' again.

Ask yourself, 'what small thing could I do today that would help me begin to feel better about myself?' Make a note of your answer below.

Re-learning to relax



Relaxation sometimes doesn't come easily. When we're anxious it can take an act of willpower to decide to sit back, breathe slowly and encourage the body to slow down. Breathing exercises can help. Here's a simple breathing exercise to help restore calm:

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- 1) Place the flat of your hand over your stomach
- 2) Open your mouth and breathe out with a sighing sound. As you breathe out, allow your shoulders and upper body muscles to relax
- 3) Close your mouth and pause. Keep your mouth closed and breathe in through your nose, your stomach should move out as you breathe in
- 4) If your shoulders rise again or your stomach doesn't move out, slow down and try again till you're breathing by pushing your stomach out
- 5) Breathe out slowly, gently and deeply
- 6) Repeat steps 3 – 4 – 5 until you feel more calm

Breathing by pushing out your stomach means you're using your diaphragm to breathe, that's the large muscle underneath your lungs. This helps us breathe more deeply and can help us relax.

You might find you're taking in a bit more oxygen like this, so might feel a little light-headed. This is nothing to worry about, just slow down if this is the case.

Learn to use triggers around you to remind you to slow down and check your breathing. Maybe use a reminder on your mobile, or the ringing of a telephone as a reminder to relax.

Repairing or changing relationships

If you're struggling with a difficult relationship, or anxiety is causing problems in your relationship you can contact [Relate](#), or speak to your GP about other types of relationship counselling. If there's someone whose behaviour frightens you, read our 'anger' information sheet.

Avoiding alcohol and drugs

Alcohol is a depressant – it lowers the mood. Other non-prescribed drugs can have similar effects and are best avoided. If you live in the UK and you think alcohol or drug use might be a problem, you can contact [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) on 0800 9177 650 or [Narcotics Anonymous](#) on 0300 999 1212.

Self-help resources

There are many good books and websites that can help. Your GP, practice nurse or mental health practitioner will be able to recommend from a range of excellent and helpful material. Voluntary services such as [Mind](#) and [Anxiety UK](#) have a number of valuable resources, look up your local provider on the Internet and give them a call. Many offer free advice, support and treatment for GAD.

Act now!

The sooner treatment starts, the sooner you'll feel better. If you've been affected by anything you've read here, contact your GP now. Don't delay in seeking help. GAD sometimes lifts on its own, but why take the chance?

Speak with your GP or a health professional for extra information or to get on the road to recovery today.

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Disclaimer: This material is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. We have used all reasonable care in compiling the information but make no warranty as to its accuracy. We recommend you consult a doctor or other health care professional for the diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions, or if you are at all concerned about your health.

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Please read each statement and record a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past two weeks. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement. This assessment is not intended to be a diagnosis. If you are concerned about your results in any way, please speak with a qualified health professional.

0 = Not at all 1 = Several days 2 = More than half the days 3 = Nearly every day

1 Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge

2 Not being able to stop or control worrying

3 Worrying too much about different things

4 Trouble relaxing

5 Being so restless that it is hard to sit still

6 Becoming easily annoyed or irritable

7 Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen

Total GAD-7 score =

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Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe
0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 21

The maximum score of the GAD-7 is 21, lower scores are better. Scores are assigned in the following manner:

0 = Not at all 1 = Several days 2 = More than half the days 3 = Nearly every day

The total score is simply the sum of question items one through seven. Scores of 5, 10 and 15 are taken as the cut off points for mild, moderate, and severe anxiety respectively. When used as a screening tool, further evaluation is recommended should the score be ten or greater.

Using the threshold score of 10, the GAD-7 has a sensitivity of 89% and a specificity of 82% for generalised anxiety disorder. It is moderately good at screening three other common anxiety disorders - panic disorder (sensitivity 74%, specificity 81%), social anxiety disorder (sensitivity 72%, specificity 80%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (sensitivity 66%, specificity 81%).

Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R.L., Williams, J.B. et al; Anxiety disorders in primary care: Prevalence, impairment, comorbidity, and detection. *Ann Intern Med.* 2007 Mar 6; 146(5):317-25

Spitzer, R.L, Kroenke, K. & Williams, J.B. et al. A brief measure for assessing generalised anxiety disorder: the GAD-7. *Arch. Intern. Med.* 2006; 166:1092-7.