

# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by frequent worries that are difficult to control and avoidance of feared places, things, and situations. GAD affects 3.1% of the U.S. population and can begin at any point throughout the life cycle, although risk of developing GAD is highest between childhood and middle age.

**Myth:** If you have any anxiety disorder, it is important to avoid stress and situations that make you feel stressed.

**Fact:** Avoiding stressful situations and encounters tends to reinforce the anxious behavior, not reduce the levels of anxiety. It is important to persevere through the anxiety to accomplish tasks and goals.

## Risk Factors:

- History of mental health challenges (trauma, depression)
- Acute life stressors (i.e., bullying, fighting, recent loss)
- Family background
- Low self-esteem
- Cultural expectations
- Shyness

## Protective Factors:

- Strong network with family and/or friends
- Cultural/ religious beliefs
- Clinical Intervention
- Emotional self-regulation
- Good coping/problem-solving skills
- Clear behavioral expectations

## Warning Signs:

- Rapid breath, sweating, or trembling
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep difficulties
- Feeling nervous, on-edge, or irritable
- Sensing imminent danger, panic, or doom

## How to Help Someone:

- Express empathy and validate their feelings
- Seek professional support
- Destigmatize the experience of having anxiety
- Laugh together
- Talk about the realities of living with anxiety and ask how you can support them

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What can I do at home:

- **Be an active listener.** Lend a listening ear when your child is stressed, worried, or overwhelmed. Pay careful attention to what is said and what is not said. Showing your child and their feelings respect will encourage them to start talking, which can serve as a source of comfort when feelings arise.
- **Explore opportunities for seeking help.** Investigate mental health treatment options and support systems in the community. Showing your child that you are willing to help can help build their self-esteem and reduce stress around receiving support.

Effective treatments for eating disorders:

- **Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT):** Work with children/ adolescents to change inaccurate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. **Exposure therapy** helps to question these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors by talking to a professional and engaging in challenging session and “at home” assignments in order to face the feared stimuli or worries that exacerbate and maintain anxiety levels.
- **Medication:** May help in conjunction with psychotherapy to treat GAD (always consult your doctor before starting medication).