

# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

**A**nxiety is a natural emotional and physical response to stressful or uncomfortable situations. However, being overly anxious, unable to relax, or worrying excessively can become a problem.

If anxiety or worry keeps you from sleeping and doing your everyday activities, or if you have problems coping or concentrating, you should consult your doctor.

If someone worries excessively and uncontrollably about a



number of everyday problems for at least 6 months he or she may be experiencing **generalized anxiety disorder**. Diagnosing anxiety disorders depends on the doctor's being aware of a patient's emotional symptoms. This is why it is important to tell your doctor about the mental and emotional states that accompany the physical symptoms you are experiencing.

An article in the June 21, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports on a study testing the use of a certain type of medication to treat generalized anxiety disorder.

## WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are illnesses related to a fear or anxiety response becoming activated in a situation when it is not needed, more strongly than is needed, or for a longer period than is needed. Anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental disorders.

## TREATMENT OF ANXIETY DISORDERS:

The symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder and other anxiety disorders are similar to symptoms for some other medical conditions. Therefore, before undergoing treatment for anxiety disorders a person should have a thorough medical examination.

Some of the treatments used to treat anxiety disorders are:

- Biofeedback – techniques to increase control over anxiety by measuring physical responses such as muscle tension or **pulse rate** (the pulse rate gives an indication of the rate at which the heart is beating; your heart tends to beat faster when you are experiencing anxiety)
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy – the patient is helped to be aware of and change thought patterns and behavior patterns to reduce and cope with anxieties or fears
- Medication – a number of medications are available to relieve anxiety symptoms
- Psychotherapy – the patient is helped to understand sources of the anxieties or fears he or she experiences in order to deal with them more successfully
- Combination therapy – a combination of medication with psychotherapy or cognitive-behavioral therapy

*If your doctor prescribes medication, you should let him or her know about any other prescription or nonprescription drugs or herbal supplements you are taking, so that you can avoid drug interactions.*

*Additional Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, American Psychiatric Association, Anxiety Disorders Association of America, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine*

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## PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:

Some of the emotional and mental symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder are:

- Chronic and exaggerated worry and tension
- Inability to relax
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating

## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:

- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Institute of Mental Health  
*Anxiety Disorders*  
888/8-ANXIETY or 301/443-4513  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)
- American Psychiatric Association  
*Let's Talk Facts About ... Anxiety Disorders*  
1400 K Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Fax on demand 202/682-6000  
or [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm). *JAMA* Patient Pages on 2 other types of anxiety disorders were published previously: panic disorder on May 17, 2000, and obsessive-compulsive disorder on November 25, 1998.

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