

# Oh My GAD: Understanding Generalized Anxiety Disorder

*Let's talk about Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), what it is, why we need to be aware of it now, more than ever, and what to do about it!*

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*Generalized Anxiety Disorder, also known as GAD, is the term used to identify people suffering from excessive levels of worry, over-thinking, and anxiety over several areas of their lives for a prolonged period of time. As its name suggests, generalized anxiety does not limit itself to one or two areas of life — it is chronic worry about real life concerns and it can be quite understandably and expectedly — distressing, like a challenging health diagnosis or a high-pressure career phase.*

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Chronic, excessive worrying — where thoughts become distorted and worries are blown completely out of proportion — can spread to any area of life, from simple life-maintenance tasks, like car repairs, deadlines, meal preparation, or relationship challenges, to larger concerns like health, household finances, and career prospects. GAD sufferers cannot stop themselves from constantly worrying, and ruminating thinking about things over and over, catastrophizing and forecasting worst-case scenarios, in even the most inconsequential and trivial areas of life.

## **Fueled by fear**

Generalized anxiety disorder is fuelled by the fear of the unknown. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 shook the world, fears for our safety and security came up for many. People starting thinking that the world was not the safe place we had thought it to be, triggered a dramatic spike in generalized anxiety disorders. Likewise, the global COVID pandemic has shaken the very foundations of people around the world. People are justifiably worried about their health and the wellbeing of their families, friends, businesses, finances, and communities, and struggle with fear of the unknown. As vaccines offer hope and an eventual end to COVID, people are left struggling in unprecedented numbers with troubling symptoms of generalized anxiety.

## **Troubling symptoms**

Adults suffering from GAD find themselves exhausted and on edge, and unable to stop their racing negative thoughts and dread of impending chaos and imagined worst-case scenarios. They are irritable and lack patience with others. They often experience troubling physical symptoms, like muscle tension and aches, heart palpitations, headaches, and insomnia. They experience restlessness and have difficulty concentrating on tasks and staying present. They often draw a blank and lose their train of thought mid-conversation. Children suffering from GAD tend to doubt their ability to complete tasks, and perform in social situations, like sports, games, and other play activities.

## **When our worrying becomes problematic**

During COVID, excessive worrying and focusing on the bad news of the day became a way of life for many people. Social media exploded with mounting conflicts and conspiracy theories, and there seemed to be no escape from endless — and often sensationalized and dire — media coverage of the virus. It is no wonder that many people found themselves with mounting fears, and began imagining worst-case scenarios.

It is natural to worry to some extent, but GAD sufferers worry to a point where they are no longer in control of their thoughts, and they begin experiencing problematic symptoms that diminish the quality of their lives.

### ***It's our thoughts that count***

When it comes to conquering GAD, it's our thoughts that count! Our thoughts are powerful things. Our thoughts, whether they are positive or negative, shape our lives. Positive thinking propels us forward, while negative thoughts feed our fears and cause us pain and suffering. Tackling generalized anxiety involves conquering our fears by challenging our negative thoughts and replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. We need to challenge our negative automatic thoughts of low self-worth and a loss of faith in our ability to handle life's challenges. We need to examine the probability versus the possibility of imagined worst-case scenarios taking place. We need to look at our distorted negative beliefs about how the world works, and our irrational fears of our inability to cope with whatever lies ahead.

### ***As the world returns to normal***

As the world reopens and life returns to normal, it is important that we bring in compassion for ourselves and others, and what we have been through. We need to understand that when the world returns to normal, there is a possibility that excessive worrying and troublesome symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder will not simply dissolve. We need to know and recognize symptoms in ourselves and others. We need to realize that there is help available to those who need it, and strategies and supports for people suffering from GAD.

We need to remember that there is hope. But above all else, we need to remember that we have handled life as it came so far, and we will continue to handle what comes our way.

We need to tell ourselves that this is a moment in time and that this moment will pass.

### **Conquering Generalized Anxiety**

*No matter how entrenched we may be in excessive worries and feelings of dread and anxiety, there are ways out of generalized anxiety disorder. Here are 6 powerful strategies to help conquer GAD:*

- **Be aware** of the signs of GAD. Prolonged incessant worry and rumination, insomnia, headaches, and muscle aches, and an inability to concentrate are signs of trouble. Remember, identifying a problem is the first step to a cure.
- **Bring in compassion** for yourself and others who have struggled through the many stressors of the pandemic.
- **Understand** that when the world returns to normal, there is a very strong likelihood that your excessive worries and troublesome symptoms may not go away on their own.
- **Explore** relaxation techniques, like deep breathing, yoga, and meditation to help quiet the mind and restore the body.
- **Examine the probability versus the possibility** of worst-case scenarios taking place. Challenging negative thoughts, and restoring your faith in your ability to handle whatever comes your way is key to conquering anxiety about the future.
- **Remember** that this is a moment in time and this moment will pass. Remember that so far, you have managed the challenges that have come your way. Remember that life is all about making your faith bigger than your fear.
- **Seek help** if you are unable to regain control of your thoughts and fears. CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) has proven to be an effective treatment.

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*About the author*

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021. <https://www.drmonicavermani.com/>*

*Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.a deeperwellness.com/>*

