

Feeling stressed, worried and tense at times is very much a part of the experience of being human. However, for some people, these feelings persist to the point that they cause significant distress and interfere with normal routine, social activities or ability to work.

When worry spreads across different areas of life and is persistent, excessive and hard to control, it can be part of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is one of the most common anxiety disorders, with approximately six out of every 100 Australians experiencing it at some point in their lives.

Worry that is present most days for a period of at least six months is one symptom that people with GAD experience. Other symptoms of GAD include:

- feeling constantly 'on edge' and unable to relax
- muscle tension
- difficulty falling and staying asleep
- feeling tired or easily exhausted
- increased irritability
- difficulty concentrating and focusing on a task.

What causes GAD?

It is important to understand that GAD is not usually caused by one thing. A person may have a biological vulnerability to GAD if there is a history of anxiety in the family. Particular beliefs (e.g., that worry is useful, or that things must be done perfectly or not at all) and avoidance of potentially stressful events are also associated with GAD. It is important to note that having a vulnerability to anxiety does not mean that the individual will experience GAD. GAD can be triggered by a stressful life event such as losing a job, relationship breakdown, and other periods of prolonged stress.

Getting help

There are effective treatments available to help people overcome GAD. One of the most effective treatments for GAD is cognitive behavioural therapy – this approach recognises that the way we think and act affects the way we feel.

During this therapy you will learn:

- a structured approach to problem-solving to help you manage the day-to-day stressors
- strategies to challenge your negative thinking that triggers and maintains your worry
- anxiety management strategies to help you manage the physical symptoms (e.g., muscle tension) that are associated with worry.

The therapy may involve 8-12 weekly sessions with a mental health professional but may require longer, depending on your needs. Your doctor may also have suggested medication which can be of assistance in managing feelings associated with anxiety.

Self-management resources

Below is a list of internet and other written resources that may help you, together with the treatment recommended by your doctor.

- Open Arms (<https://www.openarms.gov.au/>) has information on mental health and wellbeing, wellbeing programs, smartphone apps and information booklets.
- Useful materials are available from beyondblue (www.beyondblue.org.au), the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (www.crufad.org), and SANE (www.sane.org).
- Mental Health Online (www.mentalhealthonline.org.au) is an internet-based treatment clinic affiliated with Swinburne University.

Open Arms - Veterans & Families counselling can be reached 24 hours a day across Australia for crisis support and counselling. Call 1800 011 046.