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Generalized Anxiety

How do you know when anxiety is a medical problem?

Everyone feels anxious or nervous once in a while. That is normal and can be a part of everyday life. But being extremely anxious or worried on most days for extended periods of time is not normal. This is called "generalized anxiety disorder." The disorder can make it hard to do everyday tasks.

Generalized anxiety disorder is just one of multiple anxiety disorders. There are others, such as panic disorder and phobias. Here we will focus on providing an overview of generalized anxiety disorder.

What are the symptoms of extreme or severe anxiety?

People with extreme or severe anxiety feel very worried or "on edge" much of the time. They can have trouble sleeping or forget things. Plus, they can have physical symptoms. For instance, people with severe anxiety often feel very tired and have tense muscles. Some get stomach aches or feel chest "tightness."

Should I see my doctor?

See your doctor if you:

- Are more anxious than you think is normal
- Get overly anxious about things that other people handle more easily

Your doctor can ask you questions that are designed to measure a person's anxiety level. If you do have a problem with anxiety, there are a multitude of different treatments that can help.

Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better?

Yes. Exercise can help many people feel less anxious. It's also a good idea to cut down on or stop drinking coffee and other sources of caffeine. Caffeine can make anxiety worse. Alcohol use can also affect anxiety and can lead to symptom worsening after use.

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How is anxiety treated?

Treatments include:

- **Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy involves meeting with a mental health counselor to talk about your feelings, relationships, and worries. Therapy can help you find new ways of thinking about your situation so that you feel less anxious. In therapy, you might also learn new skills to reduce anxiety.
- **Medicines:** Medicines used to treat depression can relieve anxiety, too, even in people who are not depressed. Your doctor will help you decide which medicines might be good treatment for your situation.

Some people have psychotherapy and take medicines at the same time.

There is no reason to feel embarrassed about getting treatment for anxiety. Anxiety is a common problem. It affects all kinds of people in various stages of life.

Keep in mind that it might take a little while to find the right treatment. People respond in different ways to medicines and therapy, so you might need to try a few approaches before you find the one that helps you most. The key is to not give up and to let your doctor know how you feel along the way. Most medications take 6-8 weeks before they're full effect is felt.

Are there herbal treatments or vitamins I can take?

Makers of herbal drugs sometimes claim that their products relieve stress or anxiety. Studies suggest that kava and chamomile may modestly reduce anxiety in people with generalized anxiety disorder, but findings from other trials of valerian, passion flower, and St. John's wort are either mixed or negative. Many herbs can be poisonous or addictive and serious adverse effects of herbal remedies tested in anxiety disorders include liver damage associated with kava and blood thinning effects with chamomile.

Research studies have shown associations with deficiencies in zinc, vitamin B6, and vitamin B12 and various anxiety disorders. There are small clinical trials which suggest supplementation with these can improve anxiety symptoms, but overall, the evidence to support this is weak.

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What if I want to get pregnant?

If you take medicines to treat anxiety, speak to your doctor before you start trying to get pregnant. Some of the medicines used to treat anxiety can cause problems for babies, so you might need to switch medicines before you get pregnant. Safe medications are available to manage your anxiety symptoms while you're pregnant and/or breastfeeding, so you don't have to go without treatment.

What will my life be like?

People with anxiety disorders often have to deal with some anxiety for the rest of their life. For some, anxiety comes and goes, but gets bad during times of stress. The good news is, many people find effective treatments or ways to deal with their anxiety.