

# Generalized Anxiety Disorder



The Mississippi Department of Mental Health is working to change the way you think about mental health. One of the most difficult challenges the field of mental health faces in Mississippi is stigma. Our goal is to eliminate misconceptions and promote a better understanding of mental health and illnesses. The following information is a way to help you "Think Again" about generalized anxiety disorder and understand the related issues.

## **What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?**

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is much more than the normal anxiety people experience day to day. It's chronic and fills one's day with exaggerated worry and tension, even though there is little or nothing to provoke it. Having this disorder means always anticipating disaster, often worrying excessively about health, money, family, or work. Sometimes, though, the source of the worry is hard to pinpoint. Simply the thought of getting through the day provokes anxiety.

GAD affects about four million adult Americans and about twice as many women as men. The disorder comes on gradually and can begin across the life cycle, though the risk is highest between childhood and middle age. It is diagnosed when someone spends at least six months worrying excessively about a number of everyday problems. There is evidence that genes play a modest role in GAD.

## **What are the signs & symptoms?**

People with GAD can't seem to shake their concerns, even though they usually realize that their anxiety is more intense than the situation warrants. Their worries are accompanied by physical symptoms, especially fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, irritability, sweating, and hot flashes. People with GAD may feel lightheaded or out of breath. Individuals with GAD seem unable to relax, and they may startle more easily than other people. They tend to have difficulty concentrating, too. Often, they have trouble falling or staying asleep. Unlike people with several other anxiety disorders, people with GAD don't characteristically avoid certain situations as a result of their disorder. When impairment associated with GAD is mild, people with the disorder may be able to function in social settings or on the job. If severe, however, GAD can be very debilitating, making it difficult to carry out even the most ordinary daily activities.

## **What type of treatment is available?**

GAD is commonly treated with medications. Effective treatments for anxiety disorders are available, and research is yielding new, improved therapies that can help most people with anxiety disorders lead productive, fulfilling lives. For more information, please contact the Mississippi Department of Mental Health at (601) 359-1288 or your local community mental health center.