

Help for Anxiety and Panic Disorders

What are generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD for short) and panic disorder (PD for short) are different types of anxiety, or worry. It is normal to sometimes worry or feel panicked, but you might have GAD or PD if these feelings frequently affect your life.

People with GAD worry much more than normal about everyday things. People with GAD also have at least three of these symptoms:

- Feeling keyed up or on edge
- Tire easily
- Trouble focusing
- Irritability
- Feeling tense
- Trouble sleeping

People with PD have panic attacks, which are sudden feelings of fear or anxiety. Sometimes panic attacks happen for a reason, like being in a busy public place, but people with PD can also have a panic attack out of the blue. People with PD also have at least four of these symptoms:

- Racing heart
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling like you can't breathe or are choking
- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Chills or hot flashes

- Numbness or tingling
- Feeling that your body or things around you are not real
- Fear of going crazy or losing control
- Fear of dying

How are GAD and PD treated?

It is important to tell your doctor if you are having symptoms of GAD or PD. Some symptoms can also be signs of other serious problems.

Medicines and psychological or behavioral talk therapy are the two main treatments of GAD and PD. Many people do best when treated with both medicine and therapy. Your doctor might also talk to you about how to avoid situations that trigger your panic or anxiety. Making lifestyle changes is often helpful. These changes include getting more exercise, drinking less coffee, or getting better sleep. Tell your doctor what medicines you are taking because some medicines can make anxiety worse.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America
<http://www.adaa.org>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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