

## 4 Signs that You Might Have an Anxiety Disorder, and Aren't Just a Worrier

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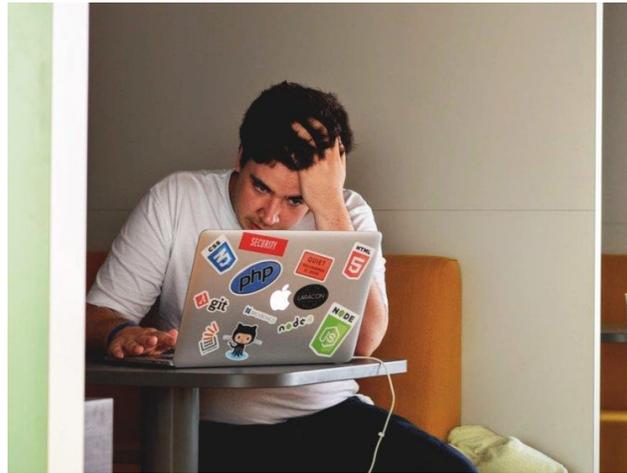
- **Everyone worries from time to time, but in some people, worry can spiral out of control.**
- **That's the primary feature of Generalized Anxiety Disorder — or GAD.**
- **We asked a psychologist about the biggest signs of GAD.**
- **You might want to seek treatment if: you have frequent worry that's difficult to control, worry about multiple things in your life, having physical symptoms like poor sleep and muscle tension, or your worry is impairing your daily function and causing you distress.**

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All humans experience worry from time to time. But in some people, worry becomes persistent, intense, and difficult to control. That's what psychologists called Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or GAD. It's sometimes known as "the Worry Disorder," and it affects 6.8 million adults in the US, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of American (ADAA).

The good news is that GAD and other anxiety disorders are treatable. If you don't know what you look for, however, it may be tough to distinguish between everyday worry and something more serious. So we spoke with clinical psychologist Kevin Chapman, who specializes in treating anxiety, to learn how experts spot the difference.

## 1. You have frequent worry that's tough to switch off.



"To be diagnosable [with GAD], you have to have excessive anxiety and worry that occurs more days than not, and you have to find the worry difficult to control on a daily basis," Chapman said.

Say you have an electricity bill due, and you're anxious about paying it on time. Some people can stop worrying once the bill is paid. But people who have chronic worry are unable to do that.

"They're still thinking about it," Chapman said. "They're still thinking, 'What if it doesn't get there on time? What if they cut off my electricity?' So the worry is still there despite having problem-solved."

This chronic, hard-to-control worry also has to last at least six months in order for someone to be diagnosed with GAD, Chapman added.

## 2. You're worrying about multiple things.



"[The worrying] has to be about multiple events," Chapman said. "And these multiple events tend to be things that are related to day-to-day experience, like your health, health of a significant

other, family, friends, finances, work or school, or minor matters like being on time, small repairs, gas prices — stuff like that."

### **3. Your body is affected, too.**

GAD is not just in your head — it has physical effects throughout the body.

"Muscle tension, sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating or your mind going blank, increased irritability — those are all accompanying symptoms in addition to just being worried and anxious," Chapman said.

### **4. Your worry is causing impaired function and "subjective distress."**



Chapman explained that there are two top criteria for GAD or any anxiety disorder. First, worry has to be significantly impairing your function in some area of life. Second, it has to be subjectively distressing — meaning that you're bothered by it.

What does that look like in real life? Chapman offered a work-centric example.

"[Imagine] someone who is in a career and any time they make any sort of mistake they start worrying about that leading to them not having a job," he said. "They're thinking, 'What's my life going to look like? What if I lose my job? If I lose my job I'm not going to be able to provide for my family. If I'm not able to provide for my family then why am I even existing?' They're not able to sleep, they're distracted at work, and they're not able to enjoy various activities because their experience is dominated by thoughts of a very negative outcome."

**If you think you need treatment, make sure you get the right resources.**



The most important takeaway is that anxiety is treatable — and there's one particular treatment you should look out for.

"You've got to find somebody who practices cognitive behavioral therapy," Chapman said. "That's the gold standard treatment for all things anxiety."

Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, is a collaborative approach between the patient and a therapist. It's all about identifying, understanding, and changing behavior or thinking patterns, and patients usually see benefits in 12 to 16 weeks, according to the ADAA.

Finally, remember that certain corners of the internet may not have accurate information when it comes to mental health. Chapman recommended two trusted sources for learning about anxiety: The ADAA and the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT). The ABCT even has a tool to let you search for therapists near your home who also accept your insurance.