

Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

What Keeps Generalized Anxiety And Worry Going?



Description

It is common to worry sometimes, but if you worry too much it can feel exhausting and may affect your health.

Psychologists call this **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**. If you have GAD, you may feel:

- Worried
- Anxious
- Nervous
- Tension, aches, or pain in your muscles
- Restless or sleepless
- Distracted
- Easily irritated
- Easily fatigued
- Unable to control your worries

Research studies have shown that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most effective treatments for GAD (Cuijpers et al, 2014). CBT therapists work a bit like firefighters: while the fire is burning, they aren't very interested in what caused it, but are more focused on what is keeping it going. This is because if they can work out what keeps a problem going, they can treat the problem by 'removing the fuel' and interrupting this maintaining cycle.

Psychologists Tom Borkovec, Michel Dugas, and Mark Freeston are among those who have identified key components that explain why some people keep suffering from GAD. The *What Keeps Generalized Anxiety And Worry Going?* information handout describes some of these key factors which act to maintain GAD. It illustrates them in a vicious flower format in which each 'petal' represents a separate maintenance cycle. Helping clients to understand more about these processes is an essential part of cognitive therapy for GAD. Therapists can use this handout as a focus for discussion, or as a template from which to formulate an idiosyncratic model of a client's experiences.

Instructions

Suggested Question



One interesting way of thinking about GAD is to look at why, for some people, it does not get better by itself. This handout shows some of the most common reasons why some people's worry persists. I wonder if we could look at it together and think about whether it describes some of what is happening for you?

References

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Dugas, M. J., & Ladouceur, R. (2000). Treatment of GAD: Targeting intolerance of uncertainty in two types of worry. *Behavior Modification*, 24(5), 635-657.

Hebert, E. A., & Dugas, M. J. (2019). Behavioral experiments for intolerance of uncertainty: challenging the unknown in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 26(2), 421-436.

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If you find uncertainty unpleasant, you might do more:

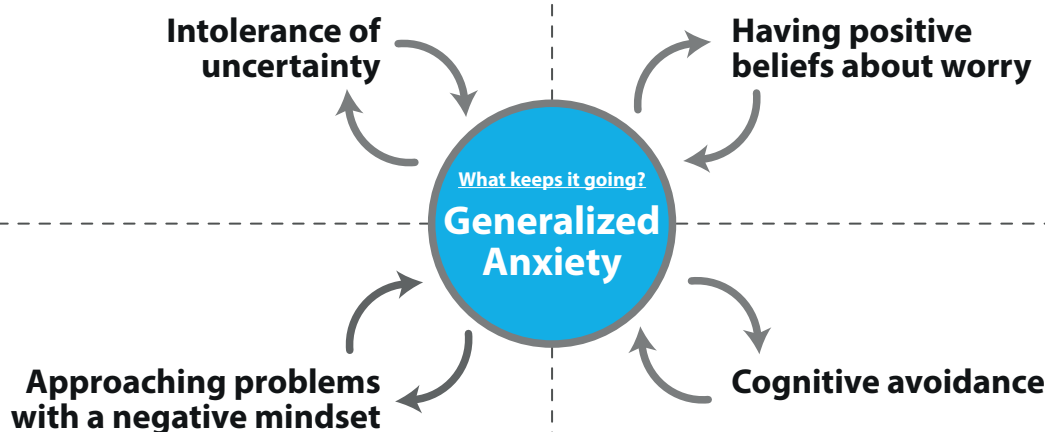
- Worrying, in an attempt to anticipate problems.
- Planning in advance how you might deal with difficulties.
- Checking and researching to find out as much as you can.

Strategies designed to help you to 'feel certain' such as worrying and planning can backfire: for every "what if ...?" question there are many uncertain answers, which leaves you feeling even less certain.

Positive beliefs about worry include:

- Worrying helps me to find solutions to problems.
- Worrying increases my motivation to get things done.
- Worrying in advance helps me cope if the bad event happens.
- Worrying can prevent bad things happening.
- Worrying shows I am responsible and caring.

Unsurprisingly, people who hold positive beliefs about worry tend to do more worrying.



People who worry often feel like they don't have the skills they need to solve problems.

If you don't think that you're capable of solving problems, you might try to avoid problematic situations. Avoidance can cause other difficulties, such as getting less practice at solving problems.

Anxiety doesn't feel good, and so you might try to avoid particular thoughts and feelings by:

- Suppressing worrisome thoughts.
- Using distractions to interrupt worry.
- Avoiding situations that cause worry.

Avoidance strategies are physically and mentally tiring. Avoiding or suppressing your thoughts can actually result in experiencing even more of the things that you are trying to suppress.

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Resource details

Title: What Keeps Generalized Anxiety And Worry Going?
 Type: Information Handout
 Language: English (US)
 Translated title: What Keeps Generalized Anxiety And Worry Going?

URL: <https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/what-keeps-generalized-anxiety-and-worry-going>
 Resource format: Professional
 Version: 20230721
 Last updated by: JP

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