Generalised anxiety in one page

What it is

What is generalised anxiety?

Generalised anxiety is worry that runs on most days, jumps from one topic to the next and is hard to switch off. It comes with body signs like tension and poor sleep. A GP or mental health professional can diagnose it from your history.

The signs

What are the symptoms of generalised anxiety?

The main symptom is worry about many things that you cannot control. It comes with tiredness but poor sleep, sore or tense muscles, a racing heart, a dry mouth, trouble concentrating, and feeling irritable or restless. It shows up on most days.

How a diagnosis happens

What happens when I see my GP?

At the GP appointment, expect questions about how much you worry, for how long, and how hard it is to control, rather than tests for a physical illness. GAD often shows up as ongoing physical symptoms such as muscle tension or poor sleep with no clear cause, and the GP's job is to notice the pattern of worry underneath them and talk it through with you.

Treatment

What is CBT for worry, and what happens in it?

CBT for generalised anxiety is a structured program, typically 8 to 12 sessions in Australia or 12 to 15 in the UK guideline, that targets three things: physical tension, unhelpful thinking patterns, and the situations you avoid or over-prepare for. It ends with a written plan for spotting early warning signs so a relapse does not creep up unnoticed.

Medication

What medications are used for GAD in Australia?

In Australia, the medication used for generalised anxiety is usually an antidepressant from the SSRI or SNRI class, the same families used for depression. Pregabalin is not registered here for this condition, unlike in the UK. Benzodiazepines are reserved for short, difficult stretches only, and antipsychotics are not treated as a normal option.

- Usually an SSRI or SNRI antidepressant

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Can my GP prescribe for generalised anxiety?

Yes. Your GP can prescribe the medicines doctors use for generalised anxiety, so you do not need a psychiatrist just to get a script. None of them is a Schedule 8 medicine. The paperwork changes only where a PBS listing asks for it, as with escitalopram, and the checks change only for two monitored medicines, pregabalin and diazepam.

- Your GP can prescribe these medicines

Who can prescribe, and on what conditions, differs by state and territory. See the pages on your state at haihealth.au/blog/generalised-anxiety.

What it costs

Is there free help for worry?

Two free, government backed online programs are built for generalised anxiety disorder by name. THIS WAY UP's Generalised Anxiety program is free when a clinician prescribes it, or $59 if you sign up yourself. Mental Health Online's Anxiety and Worry program is free either way, with up to twelve weeks of therapist support included.

- Two free programs are built for GAD by name

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

Navigation, not diagnosis: this site is general information and is not a substitute for professional advice. Written by Hai from published sources. No clinician has reviewed these pages.

From haihealth.au/blog/generalised-anxiety, 28 October 2026