

# DIAGNOSIS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

FLAME LECTURE: 46

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# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ▶ To describe the diagnostic criteria for anxiety
- ▶ To identify differential diagnosis of anxiety
- ▶ Prerequisites:
  - ▶ NONE
- ▶ See also – for closely related topics
  - ▶ FLAME LECTURE 44: Depression

# GAD EPIDEMIOLOGY

- ▶ Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is the most common anxiety disorder in primary care and a common mental disorder diagnosed in the U.S.
- ▶ Prevalence:
  - ▶ 1 in 4 children (age 13-18) will experience anxiety
  - ▶ 12-month prevalence in U.S. adults (age 18-64) is 2.9%
  - ▶ Lifetime prevalence is 7.7% for females & 4.6% for men
  - ▶ GAD prevalence decreases with age in men, but increases with age in women

1. Locke, Kirst, Shultz (2015, May). Diagnosis and Management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder in Adults. *Am Fam Physician*. 91(9):617-624.  
2. Kavan, Elsasser & Barone (2009, May). Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Practical Assessment and Management. *Am Fam Physician*. 79 (9): 785-791.  
3. Munir S, Zafar Gondal A, Takov V. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) [Updated 2019 Sep 15]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2019 Jan-.

# GAD DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

- ▶ Excessive anxiety or persistent worry for  $\geq 6$  months with difficulty to reduce worry and the symptoms are causing significant impairment or distress
- ▶ Experience  $\geq 3$  symptoms occurring  $> 50\%$  of days ( $\geq 1$  symptom for children)
  - ▶ Restlessness
  - ▶ Easily fatigued
  - ▶ Poor concentration or forgetful
  - ▶ Irritability
  - ▶ Tension-muscular
  - ▶ Sleep disturbance

# GAD DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA

Mnemonic: WATCHERS

- ▶ Worry
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Tension in muscles
- ▶ Concentration difficulty
- ▶ Hyperarousal or irritability
- ▶ Energy loss/fatigue
- ▶ Restlessness
- ▶ Sleep disturbance

# ANXIETY DISORDER SCREENING

## GAD-7

- ▶ The GAD-7 is used to detect GAD, but it can be used to screen for other disorders as well
- ▶ Using a threshold score of 10, the GAD-7:
  - ▶ Has a Sensitivity 89% & Specificity 82% for **GAD**
  - ▶ Has a Sensitivity 74% & Specificity 81% for **Panic Disorder**
  - ▶ Has a Sensitivity 72% & Specificity 80% for **Social Anxiety Disorder**
  - ▶ Has a Sensitivity 66% & Specificity 81% for **PTSD**

1. Ebell, M. (2008). Diagnosis of anxiety disorders in primary care. *American Family Physician* 78 (4): 501-502.  
2. Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe. (2006). A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder. *Arch Intern Med.* 166:1092-1097.

# SCREENING - GAD-7

Scoring: 5 = Mild, 10 = Moderate,  $\geq 15$  = Severe Anxiety

Over the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

	Not at all	Several days	More than one half of the days	Nearly every day
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
<b>Total GAD-2 score</b>		_____ +	_____ +	_____ +
Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
Having trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3
<b>Total GAD-7 score</b>		_____ +	_____ +	_____ +

Interpretation: a positive GAD-2 result is a score of at least 3 points; a positive GAD-7 result is a score of 8 or 9 points. The authors of the validation study recommend a cutoff of 8 or more points for an abnormal GAD-7 screen; however, a cutoff of 9 points has a higher LR+ compared with a cutoff of 8 points and a similar LR-.

Total score (points)	LR+	LR-	PPV (%)*	NPV (%)*
<b>Generalized anxiety disorder</b>				
GAD-2 $\geq 3$	5.1	0.17	56	96
GAD-7 $\geq 9$	4.3	0.13	52	97
<b>Panic disorder</b>				
GAD-2 $\geq 3$	4.0	0.30	47	94
GAD-7 $\geq 9$	3.6	0.27	50	93

LR+ = positive likelihood ratio; LR- = negative likelihood ratio; NPV = negative predictive value; PPV = positive predictive value.

\*—Assumes pretest probability of 20 percent.

# DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

- ▶ Depressive Disorder
- ▶ Illness Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Panic Disorder
- ▶ Obsessive Compulsive Disorders
- ▶ Separation Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Phobia
- ▶ Trauma & Stressor related Disorder
- ▶ Adjustment Disorder
- ▶ Substance/Medication Induced
- ▶ Cardiovascular Disorders
- ▶ Endocrine Disorders
- ▶ Metabolic Disorders
- ▶ Respiratory Disorders
- ▶ Neurological Disorders
- ▶ Gastrointestinal Disorders



# REFERENCES / IMPORTANT LINKS

1. Locke, Kirst, Shultz (2105, May). Diagnosis and Management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder in Adults. Am Fam Physician. 91(9):617-624.
2. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association: Author.
3. Berber MJ. WATCHERS: recognizing generalized anxiety disorder. J Clin Psychiatry 2000;61(6):447.
4. Anxiety & Depression Association of America: <https://adaa.org>