

The Difference Between Obsessive Compulsive Disorder & Generalized Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety refers to feelings of dread, worry, and nervousness, and everyone has experienced it. Everyday anxiety usually has an identifiable focus or cause, but anxiety can exist all on its own, with no known prompt or cause. This kind of anxiety can be so overwhelming it gets in the way of a person's ability to lead their lives the way they want to. When anxiety rises to this degree, it becomes an [anxiety disorder](#). Anxiety disorders, along with depressive disorders, are the most common of all psychological conditions.

These are the 4 anxiety disorders:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Social Anxiety Disorder

Historically, OCD has been classed with anxiety disorders, but within the last decade, OCD has been moved to a [category of its own](#), although many practitioners still consider it an anxiety disorder.

Understanding Generalized Anxiety Disorder

In Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) the amount of worry and distress a person experiences is greatly out of proportion to the cause and the sufferer lacks control of the worry. GAD's anxiety is ongoing, excessive, and interferes with a person's daily life. GAD also flies from source to source, even when there's no real danger or reason to be concerned.

These are the typical [symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder](#):

- Seeing most events and situations as threatening, even when they are trivial
- Constant worry that's greatly out of proportion to the potential threat or danger
- Poor concentration, "going blank" when trying to focus
- Inability to control or reduce the levels of dread or worrying
- Inability to relax or calm oneself

The physical symptoms of GAD include:

- Feelings of restlessness and agitation

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Stomachache
- Nausea, vomiting
- Problems sleeping
- Muscle tension, muscle aches
- Sore, tight jaws, teeth grinding
- Fatigue
- Trembling, feeling twitchy
- Heightened startle response

What are Some Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Signs?

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a psychological disorder in which people experience recurrent, intrusive, and deeply unpleasant thoughts, images, or ideas that cause them to feel irresistibly drawn to carrying out repetitive behaviors to relieve their anxiety.

These behaviors often include checking, cleaning, hand washing, and counting, which interfere with a person's ability to live the life they desire.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is noted by irresistible urges to carry out ritualized repetitive behaviors to avert irrational, imagined negative outcomes. People with OCD understand their behaviors are not rational, but without effective treatment, cannot stop performing them.

These repetitive behaviors are generated by distressing thoughts that intrude into the sufferer's thoughts and generate high levels of anxiety. Performing compulsive repetitive behaviors then reduces the anxiety temporarily.

Some [obsessive symptoms can include](#):

- Elevated stress when objects are not placed correctly or according to a specific pattern
- Counting items
- Fear of germs, avoidance of everything and everyone who might be carrying germs
- Strong need to follow a strict routine or rituals
- Need to check and re-check, such as locking doors or turning off the stove
- Excessive hand washing or bathing, often to the point of skin damage
- Excessive house cleaning
- An unusual need for reassurance

The Difference Between Obsessive Compulsive Disorder & Generalized Anxiety

OCD and GAD are both disorders that provoke unbearable anxiety, but in most other ways, they're quite different. The most significant difference between OCD and GAD is the presence of compulsions. People with OCD perform compulsive behaviors; people with GAD do not.

Some of the other major [differences](#) between OCD and GAD include:

- Obsessions versus worries. People with GAD [lack obsessions](#), which are a hallmark of OCD. As well, GAD sufferers typically worry about problems that do happen in life—it's just the extreme degree to which they worry is out of proportion to the level of threat that's present. For example, a person with GAD might jump to the conclusion that a sudden minor headache indicates an impending stroke and be unable to control their worry until the headache goes away. People with GAD tend to catastrophize; they imagine the worst possible outcomes for any situation that's even slightly negative.
- Focus. Sometimes referred to as the “stickiness” of anxiety, people with GAD have many different items or situations they worry about. People with OCD have a single or narrow focus—for example, fear of contamination.

Is There Effective Treatment for Anxiety Disorders?

The good news is that both OCD and GAD respond well to [mental health treatment](#). Both conditions may be treated successfully with varying forms of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, although sometimes medication is added to therapy for better results.

CBT for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

A specific subtype of CBT is effective for OCD. Called [Exposure and Response Prevention \(ERP\)](#), it involves exposing a person to the prompt for their compulsive behavior while assisting them to withhold from carrying out their particular compulsive ritual. Before exposing someone to a real-world situation in which they encounter their compulsion trigger, the therapist will assist the client to [imagine doing so](#).

Medications for OCD include:

- Fluvoxamine (Luvox) for adults and children 8 years and older
- Sertraline (Zoloft)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac)

CBT for Generalized Anxiety Disorder

CBT is also the recommended treatment for GAD. It involves the following components:

- Cognitive restructuring. In cognitive restructuring, a therapist helps a client to identify harmful patterns of thinking which lead to worry. By learning to challenge these habitual and negative thoughts, people learn to avoid negative predictions about outcomes. Essentially, cognitive restructuring helps a person change the way they think, which reduces or eliminates anxiety.

- Systematic exposure. In systematic exposure, a therapist guides a client in imagining the worst possible outcomes of the object of their distress and worry. The goal is to explore the idea of the worst-case outcome in a safe place with a reassuring person who can help them understand their imagination is not describing realistic outcomes.

Medications for GAD include:

- Catapres
- Inderal
- Neurontin
- Lexapro
- Zoloft

Absolute Awakenings in Morris Plains, New Jersey offers compassionate treatment for [OCD and anxiety disorders](#). If you or a loved one are ready to get help, contact us at [866-768-0528](tel:866-768-0528) or visit our [admissions department](#).

Resources

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