

# Mindfulness and Generalized Anxiety Disorder



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## Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder can be defined as a worry triggered by negative thoughts toward the future (which probably won't happen) that are faced as aversive and uncontrollable. On many occasions these concerns are based on past events: What if? What if what I have said causes a greater evil? A number of differences have been assigned between non-pathological concerns and generalized anxiety disorder in order to distinguish them from each other, such as: the duration of the concerns, their realism, the feeling of uncontrollability. As for the consequences of GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) we find somatic symptoms such as muscle tension (the most frequent), general malaise, tachycardia, profuse sweating, functional, social, labor deterioration. Practically all GAD patients confess to being nervous or anxious from an early age, and the course of their disease is chronic, although it presents fluctuations. Currently, a lower incidence of referral of these patients to psychiatric and psychological units has been detected, with most of them treated since the primary care consultations (with a single prescription of anxiolytics as treatment). The prevalence is higher in women than in men (women account for 60-70% of the total) and the band with the highest incidence is 25-55 years.

It is estimated that more than half of people with GAD are misdiagnosed. This data is associated with a normalization of the pathology, considering the "personality" of the patient suffering from it and resulting in an abandonment of medical consultations and treatment. Therefore, it would be very useful in Primary Care consultations to use the "Interview for Anxiety Disorders according to the DSM-IV (ADIS-IV) of Brown, DiNardo and Barlow", or other interviews and validated questionnaires, to facilitate a correct diagnosis, for early treatment and therapy, to help prevent the chronicization of the disease. In the face of recurrences and the lack of continuity of treatment by patients,

it was decided to conduct a literature review on the effectiveness of an alternative treatment, not pharmacological or invasive that is effective in the clinical improvement of people diagnosed with GAD, this being the practice of Mindfulness.

## Mindfulness and Generalized Anxiety Disorder

There are numerous ways to refer to "Mindfulness", also translated as an old synonym of "attention", and currently used as "Mindfulness", "Full Consciousness", "Mental Presence", "Full Presence/Open Consciousness", etc. It consists of the consciousness that appears by paying intentional attention to the present moment, without judging or rejecting the experience in any way. It has been considered that the first practices of Mindfulness for the reduction of anxiety, [1-8] have influences of Buddhist culture and contemplative psychology. The word Mindfulness is also one of the first translations that were made of the word "sati", nominalization of the verb "sarati", which means to remember or recall in "pali", a language similar to Sanskrit, and that was spoken at the time when Buddha began teaching 2500 years ago.

Since remembering is precisely to bring to the present, in its ultimate conception "sati" or "mindfulness" is the basic human ability to "remember" us being in the present, that is, constantly returning to the here and now. It is the ability that allows us to remember where we are going as we walk, even though during the journey we have lost ourselves in thousands of thoughts. The benefit of applying the Mindfulness in programs to reduce anxiety, increasingly has a growing scientific support, supported by neuroscience and research on stress. However, it has not yet obtained enough scientific evidence to position it along with other techniques, such as exposure to behavioral therapy. A stressful or conflicting situation will generate the same emotions and with the

same intensity in a person who performs Mindfulness meditation as in a non-meditative; however, many studies agree that the difference lies in that meditator will take less time to recover after a traumatic event. The brain, mind and body of meditators is regulated much earlier than that of non-meditators, it returns much more easily and quickly to a state of tranquility and balance.

Since its creation, the Mindfulness has been applied to both healthy people under stress, as well as patients with various diseases: fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia. It is even part of the mental training programs of many American military, and is taught in the weeks leading up to a deployment, in order to minimize the disruption they suffer during combat and its aftermath (such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression). It has been proven that exercising the skills for Mindfulness can help reduce maladaptive attempts to eliminate or control anxiety.

Anxiety is an emotion centered in the future, so learning to focus attention on the present can be very useful to deal with symptoms such as the typical concerns of Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Anxiety is a response of the human body to something it considers threatening. It is characterized by typical bodily sensations of flight or attack and by thoughts of danger and/or catastrophic. Anxiety or panic attacks are those where the response is activated in situations that, a priori, do not constitute any danger. Mindfulness offers opportunities to expose yourself to the feared situations, instead of using escape and avoidance behaviors, or safety behaviors.

In general, it offers many benefits to adopt a more flexible attitude with which to face one's emotions and thoughts and stop trying to suppress "ruminations" and obsessive thoughts. Acceptance allows us to live our reality freeing ourselves from the resistance that generates discomfort. Although there are a variety of ways to practice Mindfulness, techniques focused on breath control and exercise, are especially effective in Generalized Anxiety Disorder. We breathe about 21,600 times a day. The

exercises in this area consist of focusing attention on breathing, which becomes a new point of consciousness. They are based on feeling the air circulating through the nostrils or mouth, and how it causes the chest and abdomen to swell and deflate rhythmically. By concentrating on these movements of inhalation and exhalation, other distractions of the mind are diffused, and anxiety is controlled. In short, meditation exercises based on breathing control, help to get away from thoughts that cause anxiety and stress, improve sleep habits, and concentrate in the present moment.

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