

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

When Relentless Worry Feeds the Need to Escape



What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is a mental health condition marked by persistent, excessive worry about everyday situations that feels impossible to control. People with GAD often experience physical symptoms like restlessness, fatigue, and muscle tension, and their minds rarely stop racing through worst-case scenarios.

What Does it Look Like?

- **Constant Worry About Everything**
Even when things are going well, they find something to fear, and the fear is always shifting.
- **Physical Symptoms Without Clear Cause**
Chronic headaches, stomach issues, muscle tension, or fatigue that doctors can't fully explain.
- **Difficulty Relaxing or Being Present**
They can't seem to turn off their mind. Vacations and celebrations feel stressful, peace seems impossible.
- **Avoidance of Decisions or Situations**
The fear of making the wrong choice leads to paralysis, procrastination, or avoiding situations entirely.

How Does GAD Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with GAD, the mind never stops producing fear and dread. Substances offer a form of relief they can reach for at will.

- 1) **Self-Medication Provides Relief**
Alcohol or drugs help to quiet the relentless internal noise.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Lack Depth**
Managing chronic anxiety requires them to build new neural pathways and coping skills, which takes time.
- 3) **Without Treating GAD, Relapse is Likely**
They leave treatment and return to the same thoughts and fears that led to substance use.

Prevalence:

5.7% of U.S. adults¹

Co-Occurrence:

50% develop a substance use disorder in their lifetime²

Relapse Risk:

Significant

Decreased recovery rates with increased recurrence³

Sources: ¹ NIMH, *National Comorbidity Survey Replication*. ² Alegria et al., *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (2010). ³ Bruce et al., *12-Year Prospective Study*, *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2005)

Treating GAD and Chronic Relapse at Burning Tree Ranch

Treating GAD is not an easy or fast process. The anxiety has been building for years, often decades, and the coping patterns are deeply ingrained.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives clients the extended time needed to develop real anxiety management skills while building a life that doesn't require substances to feel bearable. Clients advance through the program when they demonstrate consistent change in **how they handle stress and uncertainty**.



“Chronic anxiety is invisible to everyone except the person living it. They’ve spent years trying to escape their own mind. Our work is helping them build the capacity to tolerate discomfort without alcohol or drugs.”



 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch

Dual Diagnosis Treatment for GAD Co-Occurring with Addiction

When GAD and addiction occur together, treating only one leads to relapse. Anxiety drives substance use as the brain's attempt to find relief, and substance use worsens the underlying anxiety.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Without addressing the anxiety, the urge to self-medicate remains.
- **Building Distress Tolerance Skills**
Coping with chronic anxiety requires resilience and practical life skills.
- **Providing Enough Time**
It takes months to rewire the brain's response to anxiety and stress.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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