GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is characterized by persistent and excessive anxiety and worry which is far out of proportion to the actual likelihood or impact of a feared event(s). The worry is often about everyday circumstances (e.g., the health of family members, being late for appointments, finances). The focus of concern may shift from one concern to another.

Criteria Set for Generalized Anxiety Disorder


GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:

Criterion A
Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance).

Criterion B
The person finds it difficult to control the worry.

Criterion C
The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms present for more days than not for the past 6 months).
(1) restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
(2) being easily fatigued
(3) difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
(4) irritability
(5) muscle tension
(6) sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless unsatisfying sleep)

**Criterion D**
The focus of the anxiety and worry is not confined to features of an Axis I disorder, e.g., the anxiety or worry is not about having a Panic Attack (as in Panic Disorder), being embarrassed in public (as in Social Phobia), being contaminated (as in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder), being away from home or close relatives (as in Separation Anxiety Disorder), gaining weight (as in Anorexia Nervosa), having multiple physical complaints (as in Somatization Disorder), or having a serious illness (as in hypochondriasis), and the anxiety and worry do not occur exclusively during Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

**Criterion E**
The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

**Criterion F**
The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition (e.g., hyperthyroidism) and does not occur exclusively during a Mood Disorder, a Psychotic Disorder, or a Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

**DIAGNOSTIC STANDARD**
A diagnosis from a qualified medical practitioner (family physician or psychiatrist) or a registered/licensed psychologist is required. The diagnosis is made clinically. Supporting documentation should be as comprehensive as possible and should satisfy the requirements for diagnosis as outlined in the DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria.

**NOTE:** Entitlement should be granted for a chronic condition only. For Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) purposes, "chronic" means the condition has existed for at least six months. Signs and symptoms are generally expected to persist despite medical attention, although they may wax and wane over the six month period and thereafter.
ENTITLEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

A. CAUSES AND / OR AGGRAVATION

THE TIMELINES CITED BELOW ARE NOT BINDING. EACH CASE SHOULD BE ADJUDICATED ON THE EVIDENCE PROVIDED AND ITS OWN MERITS.

NOTE: The factors listed in Section A of the Entitlement Considerations include specific timelines for the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder. If the medical evidence indicates an alternate timeline, consultation with Medical Advisory should be considered.

NOTE: The following list of factors is not all inclusive. Factors, other than those listed in Section A, may be claimed to cause, or aggravate, Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Other factors may be considered based on the individual merits and medical evidence provided for each case. Consultation with Medical Advisory should be considered.

1. Being a prisoner of war before the clinical onset of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

2. Experiencing a severe stressor* within the five years before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

* A severe stressor is a direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity; or witnessing or being involved in an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person. The event or events evoke intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

The list of severe stressors below is not all inclusive. Other events may qualify as severe stressors. If the medical evidence indicates other events result in the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder consultation with Medical Advisory should be considered.

(i) experiencing a life-threatening event
(ii) being subject to a serious physical attack or assault including rape and sexual molestation
(iii) being threatened with a weapon, being held captive, being kidnapped, or being tortured
(iv) being an eyewitness to a person being killed or critically injured
(v) viewing corpses or critically injured casualties as an eyewitness
(vi) being an eyewitness to atrocities inflicted on another person or persons
(vii) killing or maiming a person in a non criminal act
(viii) being an eyewitness to, or participating in, the clearance of critically injured casualties

3. Having a significant other* who experiences one of the applicable severe stressors within the two years before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Applicable severe stressors:
   (i) experiencing a life-threatening event
   (ii) being subject to a serious physical attack or assault including rape and sexual molestation
   (iii) being threatened with a weapon, being held captive, being kidnapped, or being tortured.

* A significant other is a person who has a close family bond or a close personal relationship and is important or influential in one's life.

4. Experiencing the death of a significant other within the two years before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

5. Experiencing a stressful life event* within one year before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

* Events which qualify as stressful life events include, but are not limited to:

   (i) being socially isolated and unable to maintain friendships or family relationships, due to physical location, language barriers, disability, or medical or psychiatric illness
   (ii) experiencing a problem with a long-term relationship including: the break-up of a close personal relationship, the need for marital or relationship counseling, marital separation, or divorce
   (iii) having concerns in the work or school environment including: on-going disharmony with fellow work or school colleagues, perceived lack of social support within the work or school environment, perceived lack of control over tasks performed and stressful workloads, or experiencing bullying in the workplace or school environment
   (iv) experiencing serious legal issues including: being detained or held in custody, on-going involvement with law enforcement concerning violations of the law, or court appearances associated with personal legal problems
(v) having severe financial hardship including, but not limited to: loss of employment, long periods of unemployment, foreclosure on a property, or bankruptcy
(vi) having a family member or significant other experience a major deterioration in their health
(vii) being a full-time caregiver to a family member or significant other with a severe physical, mental or developmental disability

6. **Having a clinically significant psychiatric condition** within the ten years before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

   *A clinically significant psychiatric condition is an Axis I or Axis II disorder as defined in the DSM-IV-TR.

7. **Having a medical illness or injury which is life-threatening or which results in serious physical or cognitive disability within the five years before the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

8. **Having chronic pain of at least three months duration at the time of the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

9. **Having epilepsy at the time of the clinical onset, or clinical worsening of Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

10. **Having experienced severe childhood abuse** before the clinical onset of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

   *Severe childhood abuse is:
   (i) serious physical, emotional, psychological or sexual harm to a child under the age of 16 years; or
   (ii) neglect involving a serious failure to provide the necessities for health, physical and emotional development, or wellbeing of a child under the age of 16 years;
   where such serious harm or neglect has been perpetrated by a parent, a care provider, an adult who was with or around the child, or any other adult in contact with the child.

11. **Inability to obtain appropriate clinical management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder**
B. MEDICAL CONDITIONS WHICH ARE TO BE INCLUDED IN ENTITLEMENT/ASSESSMENT

- Decreased Libido – if the medical information indicates decreased libido is a symptom of a psychiatric condition
- Sleep Disorder Related to Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Sleep Disorder Related to Another Mental Disorder
- Other Anxiety Disorders
- Mood Disorders
- Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Disorders
- Adjustment Disorders
- Personality Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Alcohol Use Disorders
- Substance Use Disorders
- Dissociative Disorders
- Pain Disorders/Chronic Pain Syndrome (DSM-IV-TR Axis I Diagnosis)

C. COMMON MEDICAL CONDITIONS WHICH MAY RESULT IN WHOLE OR IN PART FROM GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER AND / OR ITS TREATMENT

Section C medical conditions may result in whole or in part as a direct result of Generalized Anxiety Disorder, from the treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder or the combined effects of Generalized Anxiety Disorder or its treatment.

Conditions listed in Section C of the Entitlement Considerations are only granted entitlement if the individual merits a medical evidence of the case determines a consequential relationship exists. Consultation with Medical Advisory should be considered.

If it is claimed a medication required to treat Generalized Anxiety Disorder resulted in whole, or in part, in the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of a medical condition the following must be established:

1. The individual was receiving the medication at the time of the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of the medical condition.
2. The medication was used for the treatment of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder.
3. The medication is unlikely to be discontinued or the medication is known to
have enduring effects after discontinuation.
4. The individual's medical information and the current medical literature supports the medication can result in the clinical onset, or clinical worsening, of the medical condition.
5. Note: Individual medications may belong to a class, or grouping, of medications. The effects of a specific medication may vary from the grouping. The effects of the specific medication should be considered and not the effects of the group.

The list of Section C conditions is not all inclusive. Conditions, other than those listed in Section C, may be claimed to have a consequential relationship to a Generalized Anxiety Disorder and / or its treatment. Other conditions may be considered for entitlement based on the individual merits and medical evidence provided for each case. Consultation with Medical Advisory should be considered.

- Sexual Dysfunction (e.g., Erectile Dysfunction)
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Bruxism
- Xerostomia
- Periodic Limb Movement Disorder
- Restless Leg Syndrome
- Obstructive Sleep Apnea

REFERENCES FOR GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER


