Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Attacks

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Key points:

- Introduction
- Diagnostic Techniques and Criteria
- Conclusion

Introduction

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a prevalent mental health condition marked by persistent and excessive worry along with a sense of ongoing apprehension. Its management typically involves both medication-based and psychological approaches. However, a significant number of patients do not respond adequately to first-line medications, leading to the ongoing development of new anti-anxiety treatments.[1]

Diagnostic Techniques and Criteria:

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and panic disorder (PD) are common mental health problems, especially in adults, and are often seen in primary healthcare settings. There is not enough evidence to recommend routine screening for everyone, but patients who experience continuous worry or unexplained physical symptoms should be evaluated.

Tools like the GAD-7 and the Patient Health Questionnaire are helpful for diagnosing and assessing these conditions. Anxiety disorders are often linked with substance use problems, so if present, both should be treated at the same time.[2]

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), a person may be diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder if they experience excessive anxiety and constant worrying for at least six months. This worry is difficult for them to control and often feels overwhelming.[2]

In addition to the persistent anxiety, the person must have at least three of the following symptoms during this period:

- Feeling restless or constantly on edge
- Getting tired easily
- Trouble concentrating or feeling like the mind goes blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Problems with sleep

These symptoms are not just mild, they significantly affect the person's daily life, causing distress or interfering with their social interactions, work, or other important activities.[3]

Effective treatments for GAD and PD include cognitive behavioral therapy and medications such as antidepressants, particularly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors. Benzodiazepines are generally not recommended as a first treatment or for long-term use due to their side effects, risk of dependence, and increased mortality.

Currently, there is no strong evidence supporting a specific method to prevent these disorders, but regular exercise may help improve symptoms.[4]

Conclusion

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is a widespread psychiatric condition characterized by excessive and persistent worry that can significantly impair an

individual's daily activities. Effective treatment requires a correct diagnosis that is guided by accepted standards and evaluation instruments. Many patients have benefited from current management techniques, such as pharmaceutical interventions and psychotherapy. However, the lack of effective preventive interventions and the restricted response in certain cases point to the need for more study and better treatment alternatives. The impact of this condition may be lessened by raising awareness and providing early intervention.

References

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