

Generalised anxiety disorder overview

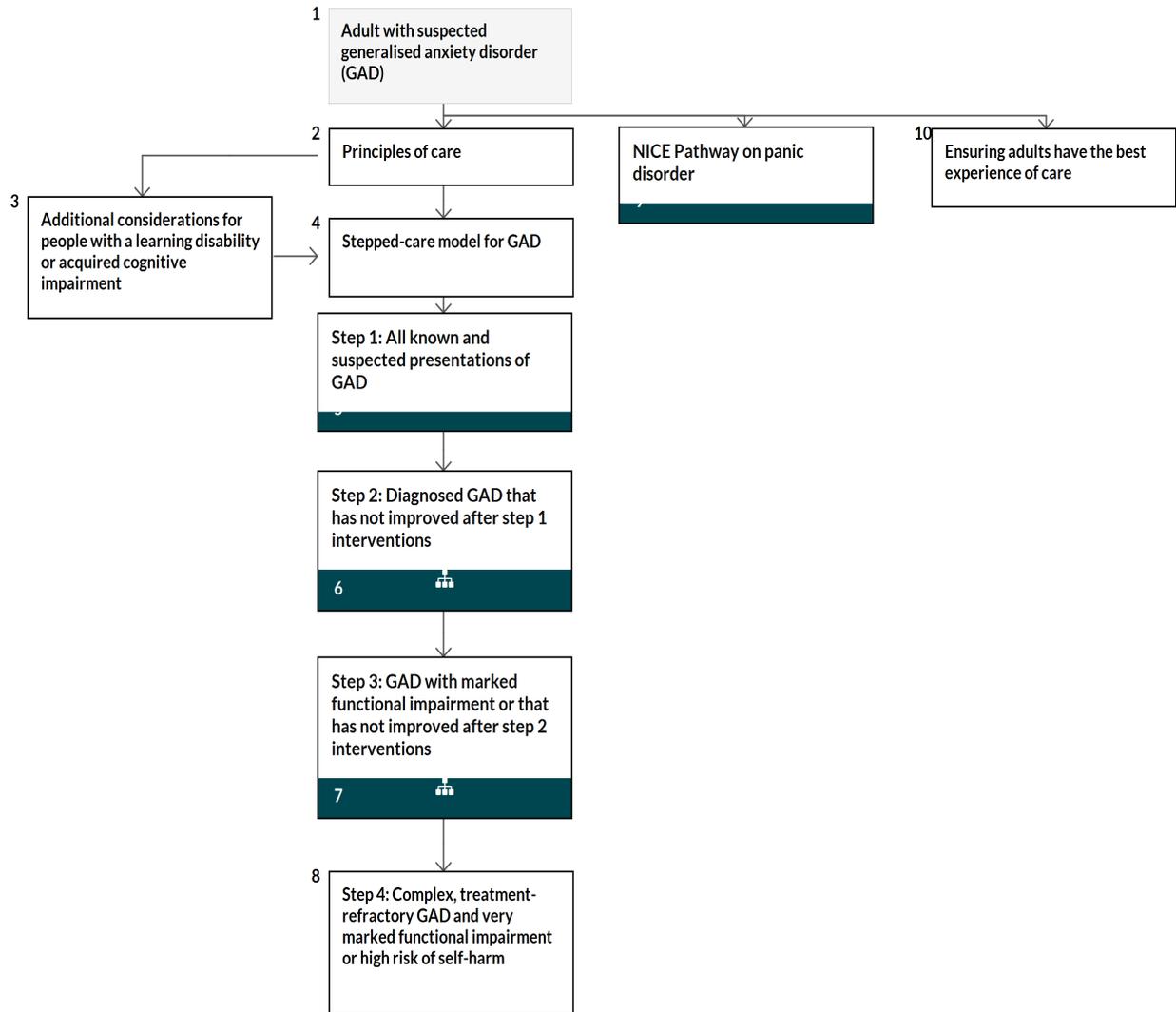
NICE Pathways bring together everything NICE says on a topic in an interactive flowchart. NICE Pathways are interactive and designed to be used online.

They are updated regularly as new NICE guidance is published. To view the latest version of this NICE Pathway see:

<http://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/generalised-anxiety-disorder>

NICE Pathway last updated: 03 November 2020

This document contains a single flowchart and uses numbering to link the boxes to the associated recommendations.



1 Adult with suspected generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

No additional information

2 Principles of care

Information and support

Build a relationship and work in an open, engaging and non-judgemental manner.

Explore with the person:

- their worries, in order to jointly understand the impact of GAD
- treatment options, indicating that decision making is a shared process.

Ensure that discussion takes place in settings in which confidentiality, privacy and dignity are respected.

Provide information appropriate to the person's level of understanding about the nature of GAD and the range of treatments available.

If possible, ensure that comprehensive written information is available in the person's preferred language and in audio format.

Offer independent interpreters if needed.

Inform the person about local and national self-help organisations and support groups.

Supporting families and carers

When families and carers are involved in supporting a person with GAD, consider:

- providing information, including contact details, about family and carer support groups and voluntary organisations, and helping families or carers to access these
- negotiating between the person with GAD and their family or carers about confidentiality and the sharing of information
- providing written and verbal information on GAD and its management, including how families and carers can support the person
- providing contact number and information about what to do and who to contact in a crisis.

See [the NICE Pathway on supporting adult carers](#) for recommendations on identifying, assessing and meeting the caring, physical and mental health needs of families and carers.

The following may be helpful:

- [information for the public on treating generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults](#)
- the [guide to self-help resources for generalised anxiety disorder](#) for people with GAD, their families and carers.

3 Additional considerations for people with a learning disability or acquired cognitive impairment

For people with a mild learning disability or mild acquired cognitive impairment, offer the same interventions as for other people with GAD, adjusting the method of delivery or duration of the intervention if necessary to take account of the disability or impairment.

When assessing or offering an intervention to people with a moderate to severe learning disability or moderate to severe acquired cognitive impairment, consider consulting with a relevant specialist.

See [the NICE Pathway on mental health problems in people with learning disabilities](#).

4 Stepped-care model for GAD

Follow the stepped-care model for GAD, offering the least intrusive, most effective intervention first.

5 Step 1: All known and suspected presentations of GAD

See [Generalised anxiety disorder / Step 1: All known and suspected presentations of GAD](#)

6 Step 2: Diagnosed GAD that has not improved after step 1 interventions

See [Generalised anxiety disorder / Step 2: Diagnosed GAD that has not improved after step 1 interventions](#)

7 Step 3: GAD with marked functional impairment or that has not improved after step 2 interventions

See Generalised anxiety disorder / Step 3: GAD with marked functional impairment or that has not improved after step 2 interventions

8 Step 4: Complex, treatment-refractory GAD and very marked functional impairment or high risk of self-harm

Assessment and treatment

This step normally refers to community mental health teams but may include specialist services and specialist practitioners in primary care.

Assessment

Offer the person a specialist assessment of needs and risks, including:

- duration and severity of symptoms, functional impairment, comorbidities, risk to self and self-neglect
- a formal review of current and past treatments, including adherence to previously prescribed drug treatments and the fidelity of prior psychological interventions, and their impact on symptoms and functional impairment
- home environment
- support in the community
- relationships with and impact on families and carers.

Advise carers about their right to carer assessment, and assessment for respite care and other support (see [the NICE Pathway on supporting adult carers](#) for recommendations on identifying, assessing and meeting the caring, physical and mental health needs of families and carers).

Develop a comprehensive care plan in collaboration with the person with GAD that addresses needs, risks and functional impairment and has a clear treatment plan.

Treatment

Inform people with GAD who have not been offered or have refused the interventions in steps 1–3 about the potential benefits of these interventions, and offer them any they have not tried.

Consider offering combinations of psychological and drug treatments, combinations of antidepressants or augmentation of antidepressants with other drugs, but exercise caution and be aware that:

- evidence for the effectiveness of combination treatments is lacking **and**
- side effects and interactions are more likely when combining and augmenting antidepressants.

Combination treatments should be undertaken only by practitioners with expertise in the psychological and drug treatment of complex, treatment-refractory anxiety disorders and after full discussion with the person about the likely advantages and disadvantages of the treatments suggested.

When treating people with complex and treatment-refractory GAD, inform them of relevant clinical research in which they may wish to participate, working within local and national ethical guidelines at all times.

9 NICE Pathway on panic disorder

[See Panic disorder](#)

10 Experience of care

Use these recommendations together with the recommendations in the NICE Pathways on:

- [patient experience in adult NHS services](#)
- [service user experience in adult mental health services](#).

Glossary

GAD

generalised anxiety disorder

Sources

Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management (2011, updated 2020)
NICE guideline CG113

Your responsibility

Guidelines

The recommendations in this guideline represent the view of NICE, arrived at after careful consideration of the evidence available. When exercising their judgement, professionals and practitioners are expected to take this guideline fully into account, alongside the individual needs, preferences and values of their patients or the people using their service. It is not mandatory to apply the recommendations, and the guideline does not override the responsibility to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the individual, in consultation with them and their families and carers or guardian.

Local commissioners and providers of healthcare have a responsibility to enable the guideline to be applied when individual professionals and people using services wish to use it. They should do so in the context of local and national priorities for funding and developing services, and in light of their duties to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to reduce health inequalities. Nothing in this guideline should be interpreted in a way that would be inconsistent with complying with those duties.

Commissioners and providers have a responsibility to promote an environmentally sustainable health and care system and should assess and reduce the environmental impact of implementing NICE recommendations wherever possible.

Technology appraisals

The recommendations in this interactive flowchart represent the view of NICE, arrived at after careful consideration of the evidence available. When exercising their judgement, health professionals are expected to take these recommendations fully into account, alongside the individual needs, preferences and values of their patients. The application of the recommendations in this interactive flowchart is at the discretion of health professionals and their individual patients and do not override the responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or their carer or guardian.

Commissioners and/or providers have a responsibility to provide the funding required to enable the recommendations to be applied when individual health professionals and their patients wish to use it, in accordance with the NHS Constitution. They should do so in light of their duties to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to reduce health inequalities.

Commissioners and providers have a responsibility to promote an environmentally sustainable health and care system and should assess and reduce the environmental impact of implementing NICE recommendations wherever possible.

Medical technologies guidance, diagnostics guidance and interventional procedures guidance

The recommendations in this interactive flowchart represent the view of NICE, arrived at after careful consideration of the evidence available. When exercising their judgement, healthcare professionals are expected to take these recommendations fully into account. However, the interactive flowchart does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or guardian or carer.

Commissioners and/or providers have a responsibility to implement the recommendations, in their local context, in light of their duties to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. Nothing in this interactive flowchart should be interpreted in a way that would be inconsistent with compliance with those duties.

Commissioners and providers have a responsibility to promote an environmentally sustainable health and care system and should assess and reduce the environmental impact of implementing NICE recommendations wherever possible.