What are the causes?

The causes of generalised anxiety are not clearly understood. However, a number of vulnerabilities are considered to increase the chance of developing generalised anxiety:

• An inherited general biological disposition to experience negative emotions.
• Prolonged stress, and past experiences of uncontrollable or traumatic events.
• Direct or indirect messages from the people around you that the world is threatening or that worry is useful.
• A coping style that involves avoiding challenges or situations where there is the chance of experiencing negative emotions.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Generalised anxiety is not always easy to diagnose as some of its symptoms overlap with depression and other anxiety problems. It is thus important to see a mental health practitioner for a definite diagnosis.

The recommended psychological treatment for generalised anxiety is cognitive-behaviour therapy. This usually includes: relaxation to reduce chronic tension; techniques for dealing with unhelpful beliefs about worry; learning to challenge and let go of worries; learning more helpful coping and problem solving strategies; and learning to be less focused on uncertainty, and more present focused.

Mindfulness training and meditation may also be helpful for some individuals to reduce worry and increase present moment focus. However more research is required to determine if it is as effective as cognitive-behaviour therapy.