

Mind Map: Generalized Anxiety Disorder



Specialization in Family Nurse Practitioner, Walden University

NURS 6501 Section 52, Advanced Pathophysiology

Dr. Donna Gregory



Mind Map: Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a chronic psychiatric condition characterized by excessive and uncontrollable worry across multiple domains of life. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision* (DSM-5-TR), GAD involves persistent anxiety and worry occurring more days than not for at least six months and is associated with at least three of the following symptoms in adults: restlessness or feeling keyed up, being easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022).

Pathophysiology and Etiology

The pathophysiology of GAD is multifactorial, involving alterations in brain structure, neurotransmitter imbalances, and neuroendocrine dysregulation. Specifically, the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex dysfunctions contribute to impaired fear regulation and emotional processing. Neurochemical disturbances, particularly reduced gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) activity, and altered serotonergic, dopaminergic, and noradrenergic transmission, underlie the sustained arousal and anxiety symptoms experienced by patients (Rogers, 2023). Chronic activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis in response to stress results in elevated cortisol levels, further exacerbating anxiety symptoms and impairing feedback mechanisms that regulate stress responses (Tafet & Nemeroff, 2020).

Etiologically, GAD arises from a combination of genetic and environmental influences. Twin studies suggest heritability estimates between 30% and 50%. Environmental risk factors include childhood adversity, trauma, overprotective or neglectful parenting styles, and chronic