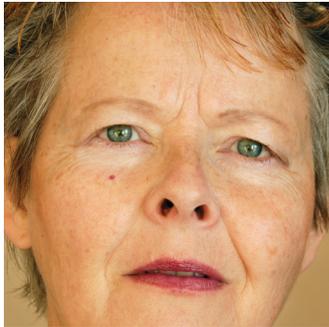


Anxiety disorders

PATIENT FACT SHEET

■ What are anxiety disorders?



Almost everyone worries sometimes, especially during times of stress. However, when worries become intense, persistent and interfere with everyday life, an

anxiety disorder may be the cause. Approximately one in five Australians will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their life, with this rate being higher in women than in men. People may experience more than one anxiety disorder, and these conditions are often accompanied by depression.

Anxiety disorders may occur for several reasons. Having a family history of mental illness, smoking, and being unemployed are all associated with higher rates of anxiety disorders. Stressful life events, physical health problems, substance abuse or certain personality factors (e.g. perfectionism) may also play a role.

The most common anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalised anxiety disorder** is excessive anxiety and difficult-to-control worry on more days than not, for at least six months. Their worries may relate to any aspect of everyday life, and even minor matters such as household chores can become the focus of anxiety. The worries and anxiety are accompanied by other symptoms including restlessness, fatigue, muscle tension, difficulty with concentration and with sleep.
- **Social anxiety disorder** involves strong and persistent fear of possibly embarrassing situations, which would provoke anxiety and, sometimes, a panic attack. Affected adults realise their fear is

excessive and limits their life, but usually avoid these social or performance situations or endure them with dread.

- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** involves recurrent thoughts, images or impulses that are intrusive and unwanted, combined with time-consuming and distressing repetitive rituals. People with OCD are usually aware of the irrational and excessive nature of their obsessions and compulsions. However, they feel unable to control their obsessions or resist their compulsions.
- **Panic disorder** involves the presence of recurrent, unexpected panic attacks followed by at least one month of persistent concern about having another attack, and worry about the possible consequences of the panic attack. A panic attack is a brief episode of intense anxiety, which causes the physical sensations of fear, including a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, dizziness, trembling and muscle tension. A panic attack can last from a few minutes to half an hour, however the physical and emotional effects of the attack may last for a few hours.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder** is a response of intense fear, helplessness, or horror after witnessing a traumatic event. The event is relived repeatedly and stimuli associated with the event are avoided. People may also feel overly aroused and have difficulty sleeping or be easily startled.

■ What effects does anxiety have on daily life?

Anxiety disorders cause intense worry which can impact on a person's everyday life. The symptoms of these disorders may lead to social isolation and depression, and can impair a person's ability to work, study and do routine activities. They may also hurt relationships with friends, family and colleagues.

Anxiety disorders

PATIENT FACT SHEET

■ Can anxiety be treated?

Yes. There are effective treatments for anxiety disorders, including:

- psychological therapies
- medication
- lifestyle changes and support services.

These treatments are often combined, which may increase their overall benefit.

The goal for treating anxiety disorders is to control symptoms and improve social functioning. Anxiety disorders respond well to psychological therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), but use of these treatments may be limited by low patient motivation and/or acceptance, their time-consuming nature and the availability of suitably qualified therapists. E-therapies that deliver these therapies over the internet and other technologies may also be helpful.

Positive lifestyle changes can help people stay on top of their anxiety disorder. Managing stress, eating well, staying fit and active, and reducing alcohol are some simple but effective ways of helping reduce anxiety. Support services also operate in each state that can connect people with treatment services as well as help them stay well.

When psychological and behavioural treatments do not provide sufficient benefit, medications may be added. Your doctor will decide which medication is most appropriate for you based on the specific condition and symptoms being treated. If you have any questions about your condition or your treatment, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

■ Where can I get more information?

If you think you might have an anxiety disorder, talk to your doctor. They will be able to help you directly or refer you to other healthcare professionals who specialise in this area.



For more detailed information about anxiety disorders, visit:

- **Beyond Blue:**
www.beyondblue.org
- **SANE:**
www.sane.org
- **mindhealthconnect:**
www.mindhealthconnect.org.au
- **Black Dog institute:**
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- **Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health:**
www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au

■ Patient notes

Persons depicted in this brochure are models shown for illustrative purposes only.

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34-36 Chandos Street, St Leonards NSW 2065 Tel: 02 8436 8300 | aspen@aspenpharmacare.com.au | www.aspenpharma.com.au
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