# Anxiety in one page

What it is

## What is anxiety?

An anxiety disorder is anxiety that has become persistent, out of proportion to the situation, and gets in the way of life enough to be diagnosed and treated. There is no single agreed count of types. The ones you will hear named are generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, agoraphobia and specific phobias. Australia's national guideline covers three of them.

- Anxiety becomes a disorder when it disrupts life
- There is no single agreed number of types
- Common types include generalised, social and panic

The signs

## What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety symptoms include constant worry, a racing heart, shortness of breath, sweating, an upset stomach, poor sleep and avoiding what scares you. It becomes a disorder when the feelings do not go away and make daily life hard.

- Anxiety shows up in the body and the mind
- A racing heart and fast breathing are common
- Avoiding what you fear can be a sign of anxiety

How a diagnosis happens

## How do I get help for anxiety in Australia?

Start with your GP. In Australia, a GP can assess your anxiety, rule out physical causes and write a mental health treatment plan for a Medicare rebate on psychology sessions. Note that Australia's own 2018 clinical guideline for anxiety disorders is now more than five years old, and the college that publishes it says it is no longer current guidance.

- Start by seeing your GP first
- A treatment plan lets you claim a Medicare rebate

Treatment

## What happens in CBT for anxiety, session by session?

CBT for anxiety usually moves through stages: early sessions map your triggers and explain how anxiety works, middle sessions build and practise a plan for facing feared situations, and later sessions review progress and plan for setbacks. For panic disorder, Australia's guideline sets the total at about `7 to 14 hours`, usually weekly, over up to `4 months`.

- Early sessions explain how anxiety works
- Middle sessions build and practise a plan

Medication

## Is therapy or medication better for anxiety?

For generalised anxiety disorder, CBT can achieve higher recovery rates than antidepressant medication, and for social anxiety, roughly one in two people treated with CBT get a benefit they wouldn't have had otherwise. Medication still matters: for severe anxiety, guidelines support combining both from the start, and mild anxiety can sometimes be managed with lifestyle changes alone first.

- CBT can outperform medication for GAD

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

## Who can diagnose an anxiety disorder in Australia?

A GP, a clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist can all assess and diagnose an anxiety disorder in Australia. There is no blood test or scan: diagnosis comes from a structured interview against standard clinical criteria. Most people start with a GP, who can diagnose directly or refer you on. Australia's national anxiety guideline is currently out of date, so clinicians also lean on international guidance.

**In danger? Call `000`. Lifeline `13 11 14`, text `0477 13 11 14`, or chat online.**

**Suicide Call Back Service `1300 659 467`. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.**

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