

# CARERS AND ANXIETY



## CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS ANXIETY DISORDER

Caring for a family member or friend who has an anxiety disorder can be physically demanding and emotionally draining. But taking care of your own health and wellbeing is important in order to cope with the demands of caring.

More than 2.3 million Australians have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety affects one in seven (14%) people, and is the most common class of mental disorder in this country.<sup>1</sup>

*Families and carers should be recognised, respected and supported as partners in providing care to the consumer.<sup>2</sup>*

Types of anxiety disorders include: generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder and agoraphobia. People can experience a wide range of symptoms such as irritability, disturbed sleep, shortness of breath and heightened fear. What is common is an uncontrollable and debilitating anxiety that interferes with a person's ability to carry out normal activities. Caring for someone who has an anxiety disorder might involve a range of supports, including: providing emotional support and encouragement, supervising medication, accompanying the person to medical and therapist appointments and assisting with daily activities such as shopping, banking, cooking and cleaning.

While caring can bring many positive rewards, over time it can also have a negative impact on the carer's physical health. It can be exhausting, unpredictable, frustrating and at times heartbreaking.

It is important to know that you are not alone and that help is available.

## INFORMATION

It can be frustrating not understanding the symptoms and behaviours of the person you care for. Arming yourself with information can help you (and the person you care for) to feel more in control and confident. For information about anxiety disorders, visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or call them on 1300 224 636

## SUPPORT FOR THE PERSON YOU CARE FOR

The mental health system is a complex configuration of many different services, comprised of public and private, government, hospital and community based components. It can be difficult to know where to

start, or how to find the organisation that offers the support and services for the person you care for. For information about when, how and where to access mental health support speak to your family GP or visit [www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au).

## SUPPORT FOR YOU

There are a number of organisations which offer supports and services to help families to manage the impact of mental illness on their lives. The Carer Advisory Line (1800 242 636) is a good place to start. They can give you advice and information about the supports and services to help you.

### QUICK TIPS:

When you are caring for someone else you often put your own needs last. These tips are a reminder that your own health and wellbeing is important. Staying strong will help you to better cope with the demands of caring.

- Eat well. A nutritious balanced diet will give you the fuel your body needs to keep on caring.
- Exercise regularly. Physical exercise can relieve tension and reduce stress levels.
- Sleep well. Caring can be exhausting so try and get eight hours sleep every night.
- Share the care. Let family members and friends know that their help and support is welcome.
- Talk it over. With a friend or family member or with a professional counsellor. Join a Carer Support Group and meet other people to share tips and experiences.
- Take a break. Do something that you love ... or do nothing but relax and recharge your batteries.

Contact the Carer Advisory Line for more information.

Turn the page for 'Carers who have an anxiety disorder'.

# CARERS AND ANXIETY



## CARERS WHO HAVE AN ANXIETY DISORDER

While caring for a family member or friend who has a disability or illness can be a rewarding and positive experience, the ongoing stress can lead to the development of an anxiety disorder.

When a caring role continues for many years, or is relentless and demanding, or when the role is physically or emotionally challenging, the stresses can result in an anxiety disorder.

Symptoms may include:

- feeling worried all the time
- difficulty concentrating
- restlessness
- fatigue
- irritability
- difficulty sleeping

Most people will experience anxiety symptoms at different times of their life, but if these symptoms are ongoing and begin to interfere with daily activities, it is important to seek medical help.

*Anxiety affects one in seven (14%) people, and is the most common class of mental disorder in this country.<sup>3</sup>*

Too often, carers are so busy caring for someone else that they neglect their own needs. But the sooner you seek medical attention, the sooner you can start a treatment plan towards better health. This can then lead to better resilience and capacity to cope with the demands of caring.

## GET HELP

Talk to your GP for an assessment of your symptoms. Your GP will be able to confirm a diagnosis and help you to explore the supports and treatments that are available.

Types of treatment include psychological interventions ('talking' therapies, counselling),

medical interventions and complementary therapies (relaxation, breathing, yoga).

## GET INFORMED

It can be frustrating not understanding the symptoms and treatments.

Arming yourself with information will help you feel more in control and confident about the treatments being offered. For information about anxiety disorders, visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or call 1300 224 636.

For information and resources about mental health services visit [www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au).

## SUPPORT FOR YOU AS A CARER

Caring can be difficult at the best of times; it can feel almost impossible if you are experiencing your own health issues.

To help you last the distance, make sure you access all the support that is available to you.

Contact the Carer Advisory Line (1800 242 636) for advice and information about practical, financial and emotional supports that are available to you as a carer.

1 Slade, T et al. (2009) The Mental Health of Australians 2. Report on the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

2 Chief Psychiatrist's Guideline (2005) Working with Families and Carers. Victorian Department of Human Services, Melbourne.

3 Slade, T et al. (2009) The Mental Health of Australians 2. Report on the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

Turn the page for 'Caring for someone who have an anxiety disorder' and the Quick Tips which may be relevant to you.

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