

# HEALTH REPORT

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- EMBARGOED UNTIL 1AM, MONDAY 16 JANUARY 2006

## AUSSIES IN THE DARK ABOUT ANXIETY DISORDERS

New research commissioned by health industry experts shows that Australians are in the dark about anxiety disorders.

A key finding is that just over 40 percent consider they have 'a little knowledge' and 21 percent 'no knowledge'.

The knowledge level of Australians about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - an anxiety disorder which is characterised by constant and unwanted thoughts which often result in elaborate rituals - has a similar pattern to anxiety disorders, with just under a half considering they have 'a little knowledge' compared to one quarter with 'some knowledge'.

The research, published in the latest issue of the Pfizer Australia Health Report, was conducted for the Anxiety Disorders Alliance (ADA), a standing committee of the Mental Health Association NSW, and research-based medicines company, Pfizer Australia.

According to Dr Rocco Crino, clinical psychologist and advisor to the Anxiety Disorders Alliance, this research shows that more work needs to be done in educating the community about the nature and treatment of anxiety disorders.

"Anxiety is a natural reaction that everyone experiences from time to time - it's part of our fight or flight response which helps us to be alert for potentially dangerous or fearful situations such as approaching a big black spider in the bathtub!

"However, for some people, anxiety prevents them from living their life in the way that they would like. This is what's known as an anxiety disorder.

"While anxiety disorders can be a major problem, people need to realise that they don't have to work it out on their own. There are many successful treatments and strategies available which can help relieve anxiety disorders and assist in long-term management of symptoms," said Dr Crino.

On a positive note, the research findings reveal that the stigma associated with anxiety disorders is gradually decreasing.



The research shows that 75 percent of those surveyed say they are comfortable talking about anxiety disorders while close to half are comfortable discussing anxiety with their doctor.

While the stigma is gradually fading, more work is needed in educating people about the problems for people with anxiety disorders,

Interestingly, the survey identifies that close to one-in-five Australians currently experience thoughts or habits similar to OCD, however two-in-five Australians don't know what action they would take if they have OCD.

According to the Anxiety Disorders Alliance, these repetitive thoughts or habits may signal the onset of OCD if they start controlling and interfering with everyday life to the extent that people cannot leave home or function at work because of the many hours spent performing these rituals.

"Compulsive behaviours can range from repeatedly washing your hands due to the fear of contamination to constantly needing to check things like whether doors or windows have been locked, or even avoiding of certain objects and situations.

"Treatment is available to help people manage these obsessions, and to reduce or even eliminate the symptoms of OCD," said Dr Crino.

Key tips from the Anxiety Disorders Alliance for managing symptoms of an anxiety disorder include:

- o Talk to your GP
- o Contact the ADA for information, clinics, self help groups, support groups and lists of self help books - [www.ada.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.ada.mentalhealth.asn.au)

To assist with educating the public about anxiety disorders, the Anxiety Disorders Alliance has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting [www.healthreport.com.au](http://www.healthreport.com.au) where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of anxiety disorders are based on responses from 1,440 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in April 2005 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

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**NB: INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS AND PATIENTS ARE AVAILABLE**

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