

# 1327 Mental illness – it's more common than you think

[Back](#)

**3 October 2012 No 1327**

One in five people will experience mental illness this year. It's an astounding statistic but one that for too long has not made headlines.

Unfortunately, mental illness is a subject that is too often hidden or stigmatised due to shame or embarrassment. As a result, many thousands of people are left feeling isolated and alone.

This is an issue that the Mental Health Council of Australia will address as a part of its campaign during National Mental Health Month and on World Mental Health Day – October 10.

According to Frank Quinlan, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia: "By being part of the nationwide conversation about mental illness, we want to build awareness and understanding of the issue and show people that it's OK to seek help for yourself or for people you care about."

A recent study showed that psychiatric illness is now the biggest source of ill health in Europe. Almost 40 per cent of the region's population – around 165 million people – experience a mental disorder each year. Anxiety is the most common condition, followed by insomnia and depression. This could, at least in part, be related to the extremely poor state of the economy and high unemployment rates in many European countries.

But, in Australia, whilst our economy is in reasonably good shape – at least by comparison – we cannot afford to be complacent with respect to mental health. As in Europe, so in Australia, anxiety is the most common condition, with women more likely to be affected than men. So-called substance use disorders – involving the harmful use of, or dependency on, alcohol or other drugs – are more common in men.

Of course, it's normal to feel anxious now and again. We've all had that experience of butterflies in our stomach maybe before an exam or a job interview. Anxiety is actually a normal and reasonable response to danger or stress; it's an emotion that triggers our body's nervous system to be able to make quick, and hopefully, correct decisions.

Some studies suggest that we inherit the tendency to feel more stress. Other studies describe stress as a response that is learned over a lifetime. In any event, people who experience high levels of stress, tend to hold beliefs which make them feel threatened, ultra vigilant and out of control.

There is no doubt too much stress can be a health hazard; so the first important step in stress management involves being aware of when our stress levels become unhealthy. Once stress overload is recognised there is a range of stress management skills available to address the problem.

We probably don't need to be reminded about stress, but perhaps we do need to be reminded about how best to manage it. If you feel tense or "stressed out" almost all

the time, and anxiety is affecting your everyday activities, then it's time to have a chat with your GP. You might also benefit from the top ten Stress-Less Tips. Check out the website [www.stresslesstips.org.au](http://www.stresslesstips.org.au)

Your pharmacist can help too. There is a series of mental health information cards available from pharmacies around Australia as part of the Pharmaceutical Society's (PSA) Self Care Program.

No doubt throughout life there'll be plenty of stressful situations for us to cope with. Just how we cope will determine how healthy we stay. So, for a little extra help on how to stress less, ask your Self Care Pharmacist for the fact card titled Anxiety.

There are also useful cards on subjects such as Depression, Relaxation Techniques, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Sleeping Problems. For the location of the nearest pharmacy providing the Self Care information, log onto the PSA website [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) and click on Self Care Pharmacy Finder or phone 1300 369 772.