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Australian & New Zealand Edition

Overcoming Anxiety

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Learn to:

- Get fear, worry and panic under control
- Recognise your anxiety triggers
- Cope with the challenge of difficult situations
- Calm your thinking using relaxation techniques

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Authors of Depression For Dummies



Australian & New Zealand Edition

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**by Christopher Mogan, PhD
Charles H. Elliott, PhD
Laura L. Smith, PhD**

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Introduction

*T*his edition of *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies* is directed at a new audience in Australia and New Zealand, following the wide acclaim for the earlier editions in the United States and the United Kingdom. These international editions have helped people, some for the first time, live without anxiety dominating their day-to-day existence. We want to bring forward further information and resources to those suffering from anxiety disorders locally, using the *For Dummies* format of providing practical ideas and skills in an accessible way.

Examples of anxiety and stress are all around us. Some airport security areas now have equipment that takes a *virtually naked* picture of you as you enter. CCTV cameras operate in shopping centres, on street corners and in ATMs to take a continuous record of possible violent events. We've suffered through what's currently called the global financial crisis and while, at the time of writing, some signs of recovery are emerging, uncertainty remains about where the world economy is headed. People worry about getting jobs, keeping jobs and their fragile dreams of retirement. The globalisation of economies and travel have made the spread of pandemics faster and potentially more deadly than ever. Environmental worries have escalated; the viciousness of Mother Nature has frequently flashed across our computer and TV screens. The spread of nuclear weapons continues, and worries abound about war, crime and terror. Children are frightened by stories about abuse and violence on the internet and TV, while their worried parents increasingly restrict their lives.

So today's world gives people plenty to worry about, as it always has. But just as we don't want to become victims of terror, we can't let ourselves become victims of anxiety. Anxiety clouds your thinking and weakens your resolve to live life to the fullest. We realise that some anxiety is realistic and inescapable; yet, you can keep it from dominating your life. Even under duress, you can preserve a degree of serenity; you can hold onto your humanity, vigour and zest for life. You can love and laugh.

Because we believe in our collective resilience, we take a humorous and, at times, irreverent approach to conquering anxiety. Although topics like anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and borderline personality disorder are serious, painful subjects, we believe that a chuckle or a smile, like a little sugar, helps the medicine go down and the message come through. We hope you agree.

Our message is based on sound, scientifically proven methods. But we don't bore you with the scientific details. Instead, we present clear and concise strategies for making realistic appraisals about the fears, threats and doubts that underpin anxiety. We help you to keep worry in perspective, countering with step-by-step techniques and exposures that build your capacity to engage in life in an adaptive way.

This book is meant to be a guide to overcoming a mental state or disorder called anxiety. It offers support and information. Everyone alive suffers from anxiety from time to time. However, if your anxiety greatly interferes with your day-to-day life, restricts your activities and robs you of pleasure, we urge you to seek professional mental health care.

About This Book

We have three goals in writing this book. First, we want you to understand just what anxiety is and the different forms it can take. Second, we think that knowing what's good about anxiety and what's bad about it is good for you. Finally, we cover what you're probably most interested in — discovering the latest techniques for overcoming your anxiety and helping someone else who has anxiety.

Unlike most books, you don't have to start on page 1 and read straight through. Use the extensive table of contents to pick and choose what you want to read. Don't worry about reading parts in any particular order. For example, if you really don't want much information about the who, what, when, where and why of anxiety and whether you have it, go ahead and skip [Part I](#). However, we encourage you to at least skim [Part I](#), because it contains fascinating facts and information as well as ideas for getting started.

We use a lot of case examples to illustrate our points throughout this book. Please realise that these examples represent composites of people with various types of anxiety disorders. None of the examples is about real people we've seen or known. Any resemblance to a particular person is entirely coincidental. We **bold** the names of people in our examples to indicate that a case example is starting.

Psychologists use lots of jargon and acronyms. We try our best to keep these to a minimum, but sometimes we can't avoid them. When we do use a new term, we *italicise* and define it.

We also use **bold** text to indicate keywords in a bulleted list or to highlight action parts of numbered steps. And when we direct you to a website for additional information, it's printed in monofont.

Finally, not only do you not have to read each and every chapter in order (or at all, for that matter), but you also don't have to read each and every icon or sidebar (the text in the grey boxes). We try to give you plenty of current information and facts about anxiety. Some may not interest you — so don't get too anxious about skipping around.

Foolish Assumptions

Who might pick up this book? We assume, perhaps foolishly, perhaps not, that you or someone you love suffers from some type of problem with anxiety or worry. But it's also possible that you simply find the topic of anxiety interesting. We imagine that you may be curious about a variety of helpful strategies to choose from that can fit your lifestyle and personality. Finally, you may be a mental health professional who's interested in finding a friendly resource for your clients who suffer from anxiety or worry.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies books use little pictures, called *icons*, in the margins to get your attention. Here's what they mean:



The Remember icon appears when we want your attention. Please read the text associated with it for critical information.



The Tip icon alerts you to important insights or clarifications.



The Try This icon represents a particular action you can take to help get rid of anxiety.



The Warning icon appears when you need to be careful or seek professional help.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or ebook you're reading right now, *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*, Australian & New Zealand Edition, also comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the internet. Check out the free Cheat Sheet at

www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/overcominganxietyau for some quick, helpful tips and strategies. For free extra companion material for this book, visit www.dummies.com/extras/overcominganxietyau.

Where to Go from Here

Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies offers you the best, most up-to-date advice based on scientific research on anxiety disorders. If you want help controlling your negative thoughts, turn to [Chapters 5](#), [6](#) and [7](#). You say you just want to relax? Try the techniques in [Chapter 11](#). Or if you're worried about your job and finances, in [Chapter 14](#) we provide tips for finding your next job and making the budget stretch further. If you practise the

techniques and strategies provided throughout, you're likely to feel calmer. For many people, this book should be a complete guide to dealing with worry, doubt and fear.

However, some stubborn forms of anxiety need more care and attention. If your anxiety and worry significantly get in the way of work or play, get help. Start with your family doctor to rule out physical causes. Then consult with a mental health professional. Anxiety can be reduced to manageable levels; don't give up.

Part I

Understanding Anxiety



Visit www.dummies.com for great *For Dummies* content online.

In this part ...

- ✓ Explore the ins and outs of anxiety, including the anxiety epidemic that's going around and how anxiety affects the entire body.
- ✓ Find all the major categories of anxiety disorders, along with an overview of what you can do to reduce anxiety.
- ✓ Discover how you can easily get stuck tackling your anxiety, and how to keep that from happening.

Chapter 1

Showing How Anxiety Affects Our Lives

In This Chapter

- ▶ Growing by leaps and bounds: Anxiety's proliferation
 - ▶ Paying the tab for anxiety
 - ▶ Understanding anxiety symptoms
 - ▶ Getting the help you need
-

Stroll down the street and about one in four of the people you walk by either has an anxiety disorder or at some point in their lives will experience one. Almost half of the people you encounter will struggle with anxiety to one degree or another, although they may not have a full-blown anxiety disorder. The rate of anxiety disorders has climbed for many decades, and no end is in sight.

The world watches in fear as disasters, terrorism, financial collapse, pandemics, crime and war threaten the security of home and family. Anxiety creates havoc in the home, destroys relationships, causes employees to lose time from work, and prevents people from living full, productive lives.

In this chapter, you find out how to recognise the symptoms of anxiety. We clarify the costs of anxiety — both personal and societal. We provide a brief overview of the treatments presented in greater detail in later chapters. You also get a glimpse of how to help if your

child or someone else you care about has anxiety. If you worry too much or care for someone who has serious problems with anxiety, this chapter (and this book) is here to help!

Anxiety: Everybody's Doing It

Anxiety involves feelings of uneasiness, worry, apprehension and/or fear, and it's the most common of all the so-called mental disorders. In other words, you definitely aren't alone if you have unwanted anxiety, and the numbers have grown over the years. At no time in history has anxiety tormented more people than it does today. Why?

Life has never been as complicated as it is now. The working week has grown longer rather than shorter and we're all likely to work longer as the official retirement age increases — in Australia, for example, it's scheduled to increase to 67 in the next ten years and to 70 in the decade following.

Broken and blended families create increased stresses to manage. Computer screens and television news bring the latest horrors into your living room in real time. Newspapers, blogs, tweets and magazines chronicle crime, war and corruption. Terrorism has crossed the globe and escalated to new heights. The media's portrayal of these modern plagues includes full-colour images with unprecedented, graphic detail. Let's face it, fear sells.

Unfortunately, as stressful and anxiety-arousing as the world is today, only a minority of those suffering from anxiety seek treatment. That's a problem, because

anxiety causes not only emotional pain and distress but also physical strain and even death, given that anxiety extracts a serious toll on the body and sometimes even contributes to suicide. Furthermore, anxiety costs society as a whole, to the tune of billions of dollars.

When people talk about what anxiety feels like, you may hear any or all of the following descriptions:

- ✓ When my panic attacks begin, I feel tightness in my chest. It's as though I'm drowning or suffocating, and I begin to sweat; the fear is overwhelming. I feel like I'm going to die and I have to sit down or otherwise I'll faint.
- ✓ I've always been painfully shy. I want friends, but I'm too embarrassed to call anyone. I guess I feel like anyone I call will think I'm not worth talking to.
- ✓ I wake with worry every day, even on the weekends. Ever since I lost my job, I worry all the time. Sometimes, when it's really bad, I think about going to sleep and never waking up.
- ✓ Ever since my accident, I have nightmares and constant images racing through my mind about glass breaking, tires screeching and passengers screaming. I'm so jumpy and irritable that I can barely get through the day.
- ✓ I'm so afraid of flying that I can't travel, even though I'd like to.
- ✓ I worry about germs and contamination so much that I wash my hands about 30 times a day — my hands are raw and bleeding. I just can't stop.

As you can see, anxiety results in all sorts of thoughts, behaviours, and feelings. When your anxiety begins to

interfere with day-to-day life, you need to find ways to put your fears and worries at ease.

Calculating the Costs of Anxiety

Anxiety costs. It costs the sufferer in emotional, physical and financial terms. But it doesn't stop there. Anxiety also incurs a financial burden for everyone, and stress, worry and anxiety disrupt relationships, work and family.

What does anxiety cost you?

Obviously, if you have a problem with anxiety, you experience the cost of distressed, anxious feelings. Anxiety feels lousy. You don't need to read a book to know that. But did you know that untreated anxiety increases costs in other ways as well? These costs include

- ✓ **A physical toll:** Higher blood pressure, tension headaches and gastrointestinal symptoms can affect your body. In fact, recent research found that certain types of chronic anxiety disorders change the makeup of your brain's structures.
- ✓ **A toll on your family:** Parents with anxiety more often have anxious children. This is due in part to genetics, but it's also because all children learn from observation. Anxious children can be so stressed that they can't pay attention in school or function well in the playground.
- ✓ **Fat!:** Anxiety and stress increase the stress hormone known as cortisol. *Cortisol* causes fat storage in the abdominal area, thus increasing the risk of heart