

You are not alone

Now that we understand what's going on in our brains, we can start to understand why the incidence of mental health conditions like anxiety and depression seem to be continually increasing. We were never meant to have this much cortisol streaming through our body and mind. The amygdala was never supposed to be triggered as often as it is. Evolution hasn't caught up with the way modern humans live. If it had, then perhaps the fight-or-flight response would only trigger when there was real danger - not just when we *think* there's danger.

Before I became unwell, I knew absolutely nothing about anxiety, its many forms and the impact it has on so many people's lives around the world. Of course, I knew being anxious meant to be scared or afraid, but that was it. As far as mental illness was concerned, I had heard about depression and was aware of the term 'nervous breakdown', but in my mind these were things that happened to other people. These were things that happened to poor unfortunate people who - for whatever reason - seemed unable to cope with

life. They didn't happen to people like me with happy childhoods, good friends and an enjoyable steady job.

Nowadays mental illnesses like anxiety and depression are talked about much more often in mainstream media and in modern workplaces. There has been a definite positive shift in society's perception and understanding of these conditions and who is affected.

That said, however, if you aren't really tapped into these channels then it's easy to feel very alone and isolated, feeling you are the only person in the world who is caught in this nightmare. It's also common to feel a sense of shame. There's still a lingering perception that mental illness equates to being weak. I initially felt such shame about my anxiety and symptoms that I lied to my employer about my reasons for leaving work.

Having an understanding of how common anxiety conditions and problems are can very much help with those feelings of isolation and shame. So too does confiding in family and friends.

So just how common is anxiety?

Mental health conditions occur in all regions and cultures of the world. Anxiety is the most common - followed by depression - and together they are estimated to affect nearly one in ten people (676 million) on the planet.⁵

Between 1990 and 2013, the number of people suffering from depression and/or anxiety worldwide increased by nearly 50%.⁶

In the US anxiety affects 40 million adults every year (18.1% of the population). The most common disorders are Generalised Anxiety Disorder (6.8 million adults), Panic Disorder (6 million adults) and Social Anxiety Disorder (15 million adults).⁷

In Australia, approximately 14% of the population (one in seven) experiences an anxiety disorder each year, with 2.7% experiencing GAD. It's estimated that 45% of Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime.⁸

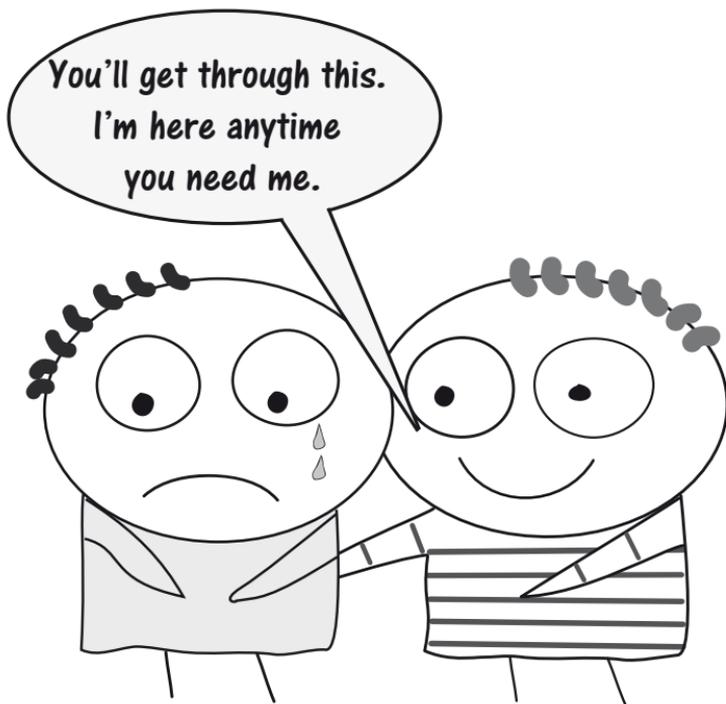
In Europe, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 25% of the population suffers from anxiety or depression each year.⁹

And in China it is estimated that about 100 million people suffer from various kinds of mental illness, and that mental diseases account for about 20% of all cases of illness in the country.¹⁰

So to say we are not alone in suffering is an understatement!

Support network

These numbers alone may not offer you any comfort, but they may perhaps make it a little easier for you to open up and confide in someone if you haven't done so already.



Keeping your illness to yourself and trying to pretend day after day that everything is fine is exhausting. In the long run it actually helps keep us stuck in the anxiety cycle. We are so terrified of being found out that we add more stress hormones to our already exhausted mind and body, which simply makes us feel worse.

This book will challenge you to change the way you look at your illness and challenge you to do things that you may not have done before. Having people to talk to about what's going on for you will be incredibly

helpful and will be very important in your recovery. Given the number of people who are impacted by mental illness in its various forms, it's very likely that whoever you confide in will know someone in a similar situation, or may well have dealt with similar problems themselves.

The more people you tell how you are feeling, the less isolated and ashamed you may feel. The more you are able to talk about your symptoms, the less frightening they become. Removing this fear – as we will soon learn – is a crucial part of your recovery.

Once I had established that everything I was feeling was caused by anxiety, I told all of my close friends and immediate family. On the bad days they held me up and on the good days they helped me remember who I was before I became unwell.