Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in Australia. Nearly one in seven people will experience some type of anxiety disorder in any one year. One in four people will experience an anxiety disorder at some stage of their lives.

Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling of impending disaster or fear and relates to the thoughts and reactions a person has when they are confronted by an event or situation they feel unable to successfully undertake or manage. There are a number of different anxiety disorders, and people may have symptoms of more than one. Below are some common anxiety disorders.

**Generalised Anxiety Disorder**
People who have Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) feel anxious on most days for a period of at least six months. They worry excessively about everyday issues such as family problems, finances or illness, to the point where their everyday lives are affected. Approximately 5% of people in Australia are affected by GAD at some time in their lives.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder**
People who experience Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) have persistent unwanted thoughts and fears that cause anxiety. These thoughts are called obsessions and can make people feel the need to carry out various rituals, known as compulsions, in order to feel less anxious.

Common obsessions include: fear of becoming sick, fear of forgetting to do things, fear of being contaminated and fear of not being able to do things in an exact/ orderly way.

Common compulsions include: constantly cleaning/tidying/ rearranging, constantly checking that doors are locked or appliances turned off, constantly washing hands or showering and hoarding items like newspapers and books. 2-3% of people in Australia are affected by OCD at some point in their lives.

**Phobias**
People with a phobia or phobias feel fearful about certain situations or objects to such a degree that they go out of their way to avoid them and may even get distressed just thinking or talking about them.

Common phobias include:
- **agoraphobia** - fear of open spaces
- **acrophobia** - fear of heights
- **social phobia** - fear of social situations
- **claustrophobia** - fear of small spaces
- **mysophobia** - fear of dirt and germs.

Around 9% of people in Australia experience phobia at some point in their lives and people often have more than one phobia. They are twice as common in women as men.

**Panic Disorder**
A panic attack is an overwhelming burst of anxiety that comes on rapidly and is difficult to control.

Panic attacks are characterised by feelings of anxiety, shortness of breath, trembling/shaking, racing thoughts, chest pains, feeling lightheaded/nauseous, feelings of dread and/or tingling and chills. A person in the midst of a panic attack may feel that they are dying, which can exacerbate the symptoms.

For most people, panic attacks only occur occasionally – usually when they are feeling very stressed. For other people, however, an initial attack can lead to fear of another attack, and this may develop into a vicious cycle where the person is constantly worried about the next attack. Approximately 30% of people will experience at least one panic attack in their lives. Around 3% of people have a panic disorder, where they have a panic attack or attacks at least four times a month.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
PTSD can arise from being involved in or witnessing disturbing situations like a natural disaster, abuse, neglect, war, trauma or a major accident. Other symptoms of PTSD include nightmares, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, flashbacks, feeling on edge, being easily startled. Around 8% of people in Australia are affected by PTSD at some point in their lives.

**References**
