

## **Anxious not alone in their suffering**

### **Jamie First**

If the pressures of life are getting to you and you're worrying a lot more than you used to, you're not alone.

You may be one of more than two million people aged 16 to 85 who are experiencing anxiety.

And women fare worse, with one in three affected at some time, compared to one in five men.

Psychologist and head of education from Jean Hailes (Australia's leading women's health organisation) Dr Mandy Deeks said there's a lot more going on in today's society and our stress levels are higher, so we are more uneasy.

"For some people anxiety and worries can become excessive, constant and distressing enough that they cannot function in their daily life," Dr Deeks said.

She said a number of factors contribute to the condition, including personality, upbringing and interpersonal relationships.

The doctor said women have a lot more roles and expectations, so there's increasing pressure on them to achieve and prove themselves.

beyondblue CEO Georgie Harman said a range of biological, social, cultural and environmental factors see females as the prime target for anxiety.

Symptoms include a racing heart, sweaty hands, churning stomach, sleeplessness, fast breathing, difficulty concentrating or feeling panicky or overwhelmed.

Harman said anxiety is like stress on speed and can touch everyone.

"It's not necessarily helpful to generalise or assume that just because you're born a woman you're going to experience anxiety ... It doesn't discriminate and can happen to all of us at any time."

But, she said treatment is available and recovery is possible.

"It's important that people see a trained mental health professional to assess their particular situation and symptoms.

"There can be a range of self-help things people can do too ... eating well, sleeping well, avoiding things that stress you out a lot and having good, healthy, supportive relationships, as well as taking anxiety medication and online programs."

Both Harman and Dr Deeks agreed though that small amounts of anxiety can be a good thing.

“It’s a normal part of being human. It helps us focus, keeps us alert and can even motivate us,” Dr Deeks said.

“Anxiety actually keeps us alive sometimes. The adrenalin caused when we have something stressful going on actually makes us perform better,” Harman said.

To determine your level of anxiousness, go to [anxiety.jeanhailes.org.au](http://anxiety.jeanhailes.org.au).