

anxiety +

**substance
use**

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET:

This booklet is part of a series on mental health and substance use funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Substance use in this booklet refers to the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Other booklets in this series include:

- *Trauma and Substance Use*
- *Mood and Substance Use*
- *Psychosis and Substance Use*
- *Personality and Substance Use*

Available at www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

- This booklet has been written for people who use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs who are experiencing anxiety.
- It aims to:
 - Help explain why some people feel the way they do.
 - Give suggestions about things people can do to help manage symptoms of anxiety and substance use.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is the feeling a person gets when they are stressed, worried or afraid of something.
- Anxiety can affect the way a person feels physically and emotionally, the way they think and the way they behave (see Table 1).
- Anxiety is a normal part of life that everyone feels from time to time. For example, it is normal to feel anxious, stressed or worried before a test or a job interview. It is also normal to feel anxious when something dangerous might be about to happen. A certain amount of anxiety is helpful in these situations because it helps a person prepare to perform at their best or to avoid dangerous situations.
- Anxiety can become a problem if it is so overwhelming that it starts to get in the way of daily life, that is, when it interferes with work or study, or when it has a negative impact on relationships with workmates, family or friends.
- If anxiety gets in the way of a person's daily life and they are finding it hard to cope, they might have an anxiety disorder.



Table 1. Symptoms of anxiety

Anxiety can affect the way you feel emotionally and physically, the way you think, and the way you behave. This table shows some common symptoms of anxiety.

Have you experienced any of these symptoms when you've been anxious or worried? Tick (✓) the box next to the symptoms that you have experienced.

Physical reactions

- Sweating
- Shaking
- Shortness of breath
- Racing heartbeat, pain or tightness in the chest
- Nausea, vomiting
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Muscle tension
- Restlessness
- Going red in the face
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Feeling on edge
- Being easily startled (e.g., by loud noises or sudden movements)

Emotional reactions

- Worried
- Stressed
- Fearful
- Irritable
- Feeling impending doom
- Needing constant reassurance

Thoughts

- Finding it hard to concentrate or remember things
- Confusion
- Thinking the same things over and over
- Negative thoughts like 'I am going crazy', or 'I am going to embarrass myself'

Behaviours

- Avoiding and escaping from things that make you anxious
- Being on the lookout for danger
- Repeated checking (e.g., making sure doors are locked or the oven is off)
- Using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope
- Withdrawing from others

WHAT IS AN ANXIETY DISORDER?

- There are a number of different types of anxiety disorders, and many people may have symptoms of more than one (see Table 2).

Table 2. Types of anxiety disorders

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

A person with GAD worries about a number of things, like health, money, family or work problems. They worry about these things more than others and they find it very hard to stop worrying.

Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)

A person with social phobia has strong feelings of anxiety about being judged or disapproved of by others. This leads to the person avoiding social places and events, and being afraid of doing or saying something that could be embarrassing.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD can occur after a person sees or experiences a frightening or traumatic event. A person with PTSD re-experiences the traumatic event through unwanted memories or nightmares, and they tend to avoid people, places, and other things that might remind them of the event. Symptoms of PTSD also include having trouble sleeping, memory problems, feeling on-edge, or being easily startled. For further information on the consequences of trauma, please see the booklet *Trauma and Substance Use*, also available in this series.

Panic Disorder

A panic attack is an extreme anxious reaction, where a person experiences a racing heartbeat, shaking, shortness of breath, chest tightness, chills or hot flashes, and dizziness. During a panic attack, a person might feel an overwhelming sense of fear, loss of control, or the belief they are having a heart attack or going crazy. These feelings may seem like they come out of nowhere. A person with panic disorder experiences panic attacks in everyday situations, and will often stay away from situations where they are afraid they will have another panic attack. This can lead to a person having panic disorder with agoraphobia.

Agoraphobia

People with agoraphobia fear situations or places from which escape might be difficult (or embarrassing) or in which help might not be available in the event of having a panic attack or panic-like symptoms. These places might include supermarkets, crowds, confined spaces, public transport, lifts and so on. The fear of having a panic attack in such a situation can be so great that a person might avoid them completely and even avoid leaving their house altogether.

Table 2. Types of anxiety disorders continued**Specific Phobias**

A person with specific phobia experiences extreme anxiety when they are exposed, or think they will be exposed, to a feared object or situation. Common specific phobias include fear of flying, spiders and other animals, heights, small spaces and germs.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

A person with OCD experiences constant, endless and unwanted thoughts, which are called obsessions. These obsessions create continued feelings of anxiety and panic. A person with OCD tries to control these thoughts and reduce their feelings of anxiety and panic by carrying out complicated and repetitive tasks, called compulsions. These might be washing their hands over and over to control thoughts that they are unclean, or checking light switches or other appliances, or counting tasks. Compulsions are often very time consuming and the impact on a person's life can be very significant.

HOW COMMON ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

- Anxiety disorders are common — about one in nine Australians experience an anxiety disorder each year, and 20% have experienced an anxiety disorder at some point during their life. Females are more likely than males to experience an anxiety disorder.
- Anxiety disorders are even more common among people who have alcohol or other drug problems. About one in every three people with alcohol or other drug problems also have an anxiety disorder.
- The most common anxiety disorders seen among people with alcohol or other drug problems are PTSD, GAD and social phobia.
- If you have problems with anxiety, you are not alone.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

- There is no single cause of anxiety. However, several factors may contribute to the development of anxious thoughts and behaviours such as:
 - A family history of anxiety
 - Learned ways of responding (e.g., from parents, friends or teachers)
 - Chemical imbalances in the brain
 - Life experiences (e.g., family break-up, abuse, bullying, interpersonal conflict, or other traumatic events)
 - Alcohol, tobacco or other drug use

ANXIETY AND SUBSTANCE USE

- Sometimes people use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope with their anxiety. This is often called 'self-medication'.
- While alcohol, tobacco or other drug use may provide short-term relief from anxiety, in the long-term, it can actually make the anxiety worse as alcohol, tobacco or other drug use can cause anxiety. People also often feel anxious when they are craving alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or when they are coming down or withdrawing from alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.
- This can lead to a cycle where the anxiety and alcohol, tobacco or other drug use feed off each other (see Figure 1). Some people find that they develop alcohol, tobacco or other drug problems because they feel that they need to drink or use greater amounts more frequently to cope with their anxiety.

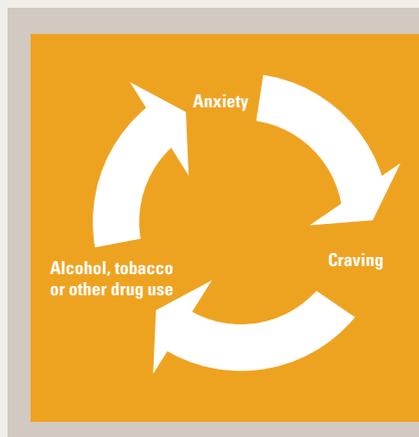


Figure 1: Cycle of anxiety, cravings, and alcohol, tobacco or other drug use

What happens to your anxiety when you reduce or stop drinking, smoking or using? Do you notice any changes?

What happens to your alcohol, tobacco and other drug use when you feel anxious?

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK HELP?

- If you believe your anxiety is a problem or if you answer yes to any of the following questions, you should seek professional assistance (see pages 15–16):
 - Are your symptoms very distressing?
 - Do they interfere with your home, work, study, relationships or social life?
 - Do you use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope?
 - Have you thought about harming yourself or others?

HOW ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS TREATED?

- Effective treatments are available. Both psychological therapy and medication can help people affected by anxiety disorders.
- Often by learning how to better manage their anxiety, a person can learn how to better manage their substance use.

Psychological therapy

- Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is commonly used in the treatment of anxiety, and has the best evidence of improving this disorder. CBT is also effective for managing substance use, so treatment can often be combined to target both a person's anxiety and substance use problems. This type of therapy is aimed at changing unhelpful patterns of thinking, behaviours and beliefs, as well as helping the person confront feared situations that contribute to their anxiety.
- If you're interested in seeing a psychologist, your GP can help you by preparing a mental health plan, and referring you to an appropriate psychologist.

Medication

- Medication, particularly some of the anti-depressant drugs, may also be helpful alongside psychological therapy.
- Medications can be helpful in managing your anxiety; however, some people experience unpleasant and distressing side effects. In most instances there is a choice of medication available, but it may take time to establish which medication is best suited to your needs. Tell your doctor about any side effects that are distressing you.

Interactions with alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

- It is very important that you follow your doctor's instructions when taking any medication that has been prescribed to you.
- Before being prescribed medication it is important to tell your doctor about your alcohol, tobacco or other drug use so that they may give you the best possible care.

- Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can interact with some prescription medications, and this interaction may alter the effectiveness of the medication. Mixing prescribed medications with alcohol or other drugs can also have dangerous consequences including overdose and possibly death.
- If you use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs and are on medication, let your doctor know if you are planning to stop using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. When you stop drinking, smoking or using, the blood concentrations of other medications can also be affected. The doctor may need to adjust the dose of your medication.

TIPS FOR STAYING WELL

There are a number of things you can do to look after yourself:

- **Recognise early warning signs.** Warning signs are signals that you may be more likely to experience anxiety again. You may recognise that you are changing in how you think, act or feel. Some common warning signs include worry, fear or dread, having difficulty concentrating, feeling irritable, fatigued, sweating, nausea, tremors or a rapid heartbeat. You can also learn to identify your warning signs by thinking about the signs and symptoms you experienced when you became unwell in the past. If you experience these warning signs, seek professional help to reduce the risk of experiencing further anxiety.
- **Take care of yourself.** Make sure you eat healthily and get regular exercise. Exercise helps to reduce anxiety by providing an outlet for the stress that has built up in your body.
- **Plan to do something you enjoy each day.** This doesn't have to be something big or expensive, as long as it is enjoyable and provides something to look forward to that will take your mind off your worries.

What are some things that you like to do that are pleasant or enjoyable?

- **Make time for rest and relaxation.** Getting enough sleep and making time for rest and relaxation are important for managing stress and anxiety. You can use techniques such as *controlled breathing*, *progressive muscle relaxation*, or *mindfulness* (these techniques are described on pages 9–12), or any other activity you find relaxing (e.g., reading, listening to music, going for a walk). These techniques can also help you manage your cravings or urges to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.

- **Reduce your use of caffeinated drinks** (e.g., soft-drinks, energy drinks, coffee, tea). Caffeine is a stimulant and keeps you feeling alert and on-edge. It produces the same physical response that is triggered when we are anxious.
- **Avoid or limit your use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.** Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs can intensify your anxiety. It is recommended that no more than two standard drinks should be consumed each day (for further information refer to the Australian Drinking Guidelines). Avoid high doses of substances, and risky drug taking behaviour, such as injecting drug use. Stimulant drugs such as ecstasy, amphetamines and cocaine speed up the nervous system and can make your anxiety worse. Take regular breaks from drinking or using, and avoid using multiple different types of drugs. If you have been drinking, smoking or using regularly it can be difficult to cut down. The activities listed on pages 9–14 of this booklet may help you cope with your cravings and urges to use.
- **Take medication as prescribed.** Avoid mixing prescribed medication with alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, as this could have dangerous consequences, such as making prescribed medication ineffective or increasing the effects of alcohol or other drugs.
- **Seek support.** Everybody needs support. Talk to family members or friends that you trust about your feelings, or write them down in a diary. The services listed at the end of this booklet may also be useful.
- **Plan to do something each day that brings a sense of achievement.** Often everyday tasks like washing, cleaning, paying bills or returning phone calls, tend to pile up when a person is going through a hard time. This can become overwhelming as the pile gets bigger and bigger. By just choosing one of these activities to do each day, you can prevent things piling up, which can help you feel a bit more in control of your life. The flow-on effect can be a real sense of achievement (or relief) that this activity has been completed.
- **Monitor your emotions.** Try keeping track of your emotions and anxiety symptoms in a diary. Write down how you have felt at different times of the day. When were your anxiety symptoms highest, when you felt the worst? When were your anxiety symptoms lowest, when you felt best? What were you doing and what were you thinking at those times? When did you have cravings to use alcohol, tobacco or other substances? How much sleep did you have each night? Keeping a diary of your anxiety and emotions can help you learn the patterns between the way you feel, the things you do and the way you think.

What strategies do you find help you to manage your anxiety reactions and your alcohol, tobacco or other drug use?

TECHNIQUES FOR STAYING WELL

The activities and techniques on the following pages can be used to help manage anxiety symptoms as well as cravings to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. You can also practise them every day as part of a general plan to keep well. While many people find the techniques on the following pages useful, they don't work for everyone. Do not use them if you find them distressing or unpleasant — it is important to find what works best for you.

Controlled Breathing Exercise

Have you noticed sometimes that you're breathing too fast? Stress can affect your heart rate and breathing patterns.

A relaxed breathing rate is usually 10 to 12 breaths per minute.

Practise this exercise three to four times a day when you're feeling stressed or anxious so that you can use this as a short-term coping strategy.

- 1 Time the number of breaths you take in one minute. Breathing in, then out is counted as one breath.
- 2 Breathe in, hold your breath and count to five. Then breathe out and say the word 'relax' to yourself in a calm, soothing manner.
- 3 Start breathing in through your nose and out slowly through your mouth, in a six-second cycle. Breathe in for three seconds and out for three seconds. This will produce a breathing rate of 10 breaths per minute. In the beginning, it can be helpful to time your breathing using the second hand of a watch or clock.
- 4 Count to yourself.
- 5 Continue breathing in a six-second cycle for at least five minutes or until the symptoms of over breathing have settled.
- 6 After practising this exercise, time the number of breaths you take in one minute. Practise the controlled breathing exercise each day before breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime. Use the technique whenever you feel anxious. Gradually, you'll be familiar enough with the exercise to stop timing yourself.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique that helps you focus on your internal or external environment, without being distracted or concerned by what surrounds you. Mindfulness can be applied to any task that you do, such as doing the washing up, or brushing your teeth for example. This particular activity is to show you how to use mindfulness skills to pay particular attention to a routine activity (walking). This technique might seem difficult to start with, but if you practise, it will become easier.

- 1 First, find a place where you can walk up and down without worrying about who might see you. It doesn't matter where you are, as long as you can take about 10 steps.
- 2 Stand in a relaxed posture with your feet pointing straight ahead and your arms hanging loosely by your sides. Look straight ahead.
- 3 You will practise walking like it is the first time you have ever walked. Start walking and while you are walking, practise paying attention to all the physical and other sensations that occur — sensations that you probably would not normally be aware of. Start by bringing your focus to the bottoms of your feet, noticing what it feels like where your feet contact the ground. Feel the weight of your body transmitted through your legs and feet to the ground. You may like to flex your knees slightly a couple of times to feel the different sensations in your feet and legs.
- 4 Next, transfer your weight onto the right foot, noticing the change in physical sensations and your legs and feet as your left leg 'empties' of weight and pressure and your right leg takes over as support for your body.
- 5 With the left leg 'empty', allow your left heel to rise slowly from the floor, noticing the change in sensations in your calf muscles as this happens. Allow the entire left foot to lift gently off the floor until only your toes are still in contact with the ground. Slowly lift your left foot completely off the floor and move your left leg forward, noticing the physical sensations in your feet, legs and body change as your leg moves through the air.
- 6 Place your left heel on the ground in front of you and allow the rest of your left foot to make contact with the floor. As this happens, notice the changes in physical sensations that occur as you transfer the weight of your body onto your left foot from your right foot. Allow your right foot to 'empty' of weight.

- 7 Repeat this process with the right foot. First lift your right heel off the ground, then the rest of your foot, and move it slowly forward, noticing the changes in physical sensations that occur throughout this motion.
- 8 Keep repeating this process as you slowly move from one end of your walk to the other, being aware of the particular sensations in the bottoms of your feet and heels as they make contact with the floor, and the muscles in your legs as they swing forward.
- 9 Continue this process up and down the length of your walk for about 10 minutes, being aware as best you can.
- 10 Your mind will wander away from this activity during your 10 minutes of practice. This is normal — it's what minds do. When you notice this has happened, gently guide the focus of your attention back to the sensations in your feet and legs, paying particular attention to the contact your feet have with the floor. This will help you stay in the present moment, concentrating on what is happening now, rather than worrying about the past or the future.
- 11 To begin with, walk more slowly than usual, to give you a better opportunity to practise this exercise. Once you feel comfortable with the exercise, you may like to experiment with different speeds of walking. If you are feeling agitated, you may like to start off walking fast, with awareness that this is what you are doing, and then slow down naturally as you begin to settle.
- 12 Try to work this activity into your daily routine — practise when you are walking to the bus, or to the shops, or around the house.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups one after the other. It helps to reduce physical and mental tension. A full session of relaxation takes about 15 to 20 minutes.

- 1 Sit in a comfortable chair in a quiet room.
- 2 Put your feet flat on the floor and rest your hands in your lap.
- 3 Close your eyes.
- 4 Do the controlled breathing exercise for three minutes.
- 5 After three minutes of controlled breathing, start the muscle relaxation exercise below.
- 6 Tense each of your muscle groups for 10 seconds, then relax for 10 seconds, in the following order:
 - » **Hands:** clench your hands into fists, then relax
 - » **Lower arms:** bend your hands up at the wrists, then relax
 - » **Upper arms:** bend your arms up at the elbow, then relax
 - » **Shoulders:** lift your shoulders up, then relax
 - » **Neck:** stretch your neck gently to the left, then forward, then to the right, then backwards in a slow rolling motion, then relax
 - » **Forehead and scalp:** raise your eyebrows, then relax
 - » **Eyes:** close your eyes tightly, then relax
 - » **Jaw:** clench your teeth, then relax
 - » **Chest:** breathe in deeply, then breathe out and relax
 - » **Stomach:** pull your tummy in, then relax
 - » **Upper back:** pull your shoulders forward, then relax
 - » **Lower back:** while sitting, roll your back into a smooth arc, then relax
 - » **Buttocks:** tighten your buttocks, then relax
 - » **Thighs:** push your feet firmly into the floor, then relax
 - » **Calves:** lift your toes off the ground, then relax and
 - » **Feet:** gently curl your toes down, then relax
- 7 Continue controlled breathing for five more minutes, enjoying the feeling of relaxation.

Coping with Cravings

The easiest way to cope with cravings or urges to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs is to **try to avoid** them in the first place. This can be done by reducing your exposure to craving triggers (e.g., getting rid of drugs and fits/pipes in the house, not going to parties or bars, reducing contact with friends who use, and so on). Sometimes cravings can't be avoided, and you need to find ways to cope with them.

Cravings are time-limited, that is, they usually last only a few minutes and at most a few hours. Rather than increasing steadily until they become unbearable, they usually peak after a few minutes and then die down, like a wave. Every wave/craving starts small, and builds up to its highest point, before breaking and flowing away.

Cravings will occur less often and feel less strong as you learn how to cope with them. Each time a person does something other than use in response to a craving, the craving will lose some of its power. The peak of the craving wave will become smaller, and the waves will be further apart.

Below are some things for you to try out, to cope with the symptoms of cravings. Put a tick (✓) in the box next to those things you think you could do.

Eat regularly, even when you don't feel like it.

Drink plenty of water — especially when you get a craving.

Instead of drinking, smoking or using, **drink water or chew gum**.

Use **'Delaying'** and **'Distraction'** when your craving is set off. When you experience a craving, put off the decision to drink or use for 15 minutes. Go and do something else like go for a walk, read, listen to music, or do the dishes etc. This will help you to break the habit of immediately reaching for alcohol, tobacco or other drugs when a craving hits. You will find that once you are interested in something else, the craving will go away.

What are some things you could do to distract yourself?

Coping with Cravings continued

- Use the **relaxation** and **deep breathing** techniques described earlier to cope with a craving once it is set off. If a craving develops in response to stressful situations, relaxation techniques and deep breathing exercises are really useful.
- **Ride out the craving by 'urge surfing'**. Form a picture in your mind of a wave at the beach. This is a craving wave, and remember that the craving wave will build up to its highest point, and then fall away as it rolls into shore. Picture the craving wave building up, getting ready to break, see it break, see the foam form, and see the wave fade away as it rolls into shore. Now, picture yourself riding the wave, surfing the craving wave into shore. You don't fall off, you don't get dumped and churned around, just picture yourself calmly surfing the craving wave into shore.
- **Talk to someone**, perhaps a friend or family member, about craving when it occurs.
- Use **positive self-talk**. Tell yourself that cravings only last about 10 minutes. Tell yourself 'this feeling will pass'. You will find that the urges and cravings themselves will be easier to deal with. Say to yourself, 'yes, this feels pretty bad, but I know it will be over soon'.
- **Challenge and change your thoughts**. When experiencing a craving, many people have a tendency to remember only the positive effects of using drugs and often forget the negative consequences of using. Remind yourself of the benefits of not using and the negative consequences of using. This way, you can remind yourself that you really don't feel better if you have 'just one drink' and that you stand to lose a lot by drinking, smoking or using.

Are there other things you do that help you cope with cravings?

WHERE TO GET HELP

The best place to start is **to see a doctor**. They can provide you with further information and a referral to an appropriate health professional. The organisations below may also be useful.

Talking with trusted **family members or friends** can also be very helpful. Your support network can assist you in making decisions, help you access services, and give you vital support through recovery.

National

Family Drug Support:	1300 368 186
Lifeline:	13 11 14
Quitline:	13 78 48
SANE Helpline:	1800 187 263

ACT:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(02) 6207 9977
Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy:	(02) 6279 1670

NSW:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(02) 9361 8000 or 1800 442 599
NSW Users and AIDS Association:	(02) 8354 7300 or 1800 644 413

NT:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(08) 8922 8399 or 1800 131 350
Northern Territory AIDS & Hepatitis Council:	(08) 8953 3172

QLD:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(07) 3837 5989 or 1800 177 833
QLD Injectors Health Network:	(07) 3620 8111 or 1800 172 076
Queensland Intravenous AIDS Association:	(07) 3620 8111

SA:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	1300 131 340
South Australian Voice in IV Education:	(08) 8334 1699

TAS:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(03) 6230 7901 or 1800 811 994
Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis & Related Diseases:	(03) 6234 1242

VIC:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(03) 9416 1818 or 1800 888 236
Harm Reduction Victoria:	(03) 9329 1500
Victorian Drug Users Group:	(03) 9329 1500

WA:

Alcohol & Drug Information Service:	(08) 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024
Western Australia Substance Users Association:	(08) 9321 2877

There are also some **helpful websites** which give information and guidance. Here are some:

Anxiety Online:	www.anxietyonline.org.au
Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health:	www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au
Australian Drinking Guidelines:	www.alcohol.gov.au
Australian Drug Information Network:	www.adin.com.au
Beyondblue:	www.beyondblue.org.au
Black Dog Institute:	www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression:	www.crufad.unsw.edu.au
Drug information and advice:	www.saveamate.org.au
Drug information and research:	www.druginfo.adf.org.au
Drug information, services, information and shared stories:	www.somazone.com.au
Dual Diagnosis: Australia and New Zealand:	www.dualdiagnosis.org.au
Family Drug Support:	www.fds.org.au
Headspace:	www.headspace.org.au
HIV, sexual health and drug information for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities:	www.acon.com.au
Mental Illness Fellowship:	www.mifa.org.au
Quitnow:	www.quitnow.info.au
Reach Out!:	www.reachout.com.au
SANE:	www.sane.org





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