

## Janine, 49

### Public servant and mum living with symptoms of anxiety since her teens, ADELAIDE

Public servant, passionate gardener and mother-to-one and stepmother-to-two children, Janine, 49, Adelaide, was diagnosed with general anxiety disorder in 2020, after experiencing symptoms for almost her entire life.

Anxiety is a common mental health condition involving intense feelings of worry or distress that are difficult to control.<sup>1</sup> Presenting in various forms,<sup>2</sup> anxiety can significantly compromise a person's quality of life, including their ability to work, socialise, and maintain relationships. The condition often co-exists with other mental health conditions, such as depression.<sup>3-6</sup>

Despite having no known family history of anxiety disorders, Janine's anxiety symptoms emerged during her teens.



She was diagnosed with depression in 2003 after a relationship breakdown, and prescribed medication for her low mood. Seventeen years later, Janine's anxiety symptoms worsened, and she found herself unable to cope with her anxious thoughts and symptoms using the strategies she had previously employed to manage her depression.

Janine experienced physical symptoms – sweating, fatigue and headaches – all of which further contributed to her cycle of anxiety. Daily activities took a huge mental and physical toll on Janine. Unable to get out of bed or socialise with large groups of people, she became socially isolated.

In 2020, after recognising something was wrong, Janine visited her GP, who diagnosed her with generalised anxiety disorder. Relieved to have a diagnosis in hand, Janine continued her medication, and was referred to a psychologist for further treatment.

Five years later, Janine continues to have the odd “bad day”, but works hard to ensure anxiety no longer controls her life.

Janine has chosen to participate in QIMR Berghofer's 'Living with Anxiety' (LwA) study, which aims to identify the genes that influence a person's risk of developing anxiety, and influence how well treatments for anxiety work, to support Australian research into the causes, treatment and prevention of the illness.

**This is Janine's story.**

Janine started experiencing symptoms of anxiety during adolescence.

“I started experiencing anxiety-related symptoms when I was a teenager. It was hard to recognise what was normal anxiety, and when it transitioned into an anxiety disorder,” said Janine.

In 2003, following a relationship breakdown, Janine was diagnosed with depression. Although successfully managing her depression symptoms through medication and practical techniques, her symptoms of anxiety gradually heightened over the next 17 years.

"I was struggling to use my toolbox of techniques that I applied to control my depression. I found they were not working as well as they had done in the past," said Janine.

"Day-to-day tasks, shopping and interacting with large groups of people became more difficult. I didn't want to go out anymore and I lost confidence in myself.

"I was experiencing physical symptoms – sweating, fatigue and lots of headaches. They would increase and decrease depending on my state of mind, but they usually further fuelled my anxiety," Janine said.

"Something small would set me off. It was like a domino effect."

When Janine was unable to get out of bed, she knew she had to seek medical help.

In 2020, she visited her GP, who diagnosed her with generalised anxiety disorder, and referred her to a psychologist for further treatment.

"I was relieved when I received my diagnosis. I was pleased to know something was wrong that could actually be treated," said Janine.

Five years later, Janine has become more familiar with managing her anxiety.

"Just after being diagnosed, I found managing my symptoms really hard. But as time went on, I learned what works for me.

"I am now able to share how I am feeling with my husband when I'm having low days, and I'm not afraid to say no to things when I'm tired or not wanting to socialise," Janine said.

"My anxiety varies day to day. Some days are great, and I feel like I can face the world. Other days I'm tired and it's harder.

"But I no longer allow my anxiety to stop me from doing things I want to do. I try to push it to the side and enjoy my life, and invest in what makes me happy," said Janine.

Today, Janine has an encouraging message for other Australians living with anxiety.

"Don't be afraid to share your experience with those you trust. Equip yourself with all the tools required to overcome your anxiety. Try to push it to the side and enjoy your life."

Janine is encouraging other Australian adults with experience of anxiety, past or present, to register for the LWA study by visiting [livingwithanxiety.org.au](https://livingwithanxiety.org.au).

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**To coordinate an interview with Janine, please contact:**

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