

## An interdisciplinary approach to caring for people living with Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Leanne is a 55-year-old married woman and eldest daughter of Gillian (79) who has been widowed for 20 years. Leanne has two younger brothers, Charlie (53) and Michael (52). Leanne is married to Jim who is an accountant and together they have three children, Jennifer (29), James (26) and Tom (23). Jennifer and James have left home and live with friends however Tom is in the final year of his carpentry apprenticeship and still living at home.

Leanne has always been a worrier. When she was in high school, she became very anxious about her school assignments. She would lay awake at night thinking about what mark she will get, and whether she had done enough to please her teacher and parents. Leanne often worked herself up so much she felt sick in her stomach and had severe headaches. When her children were young Leanne felt anxious at the first sign of illness and would continue to worry until they were well again, even when she received reassurance from the doctor.

Over time this has not changed, and her worry seems to have heightened since two of her children left home. She often says to her friends who have younger children "It's so much easier when they are living at home and you can see what is going on, when they leave home, you just worry more." When her friends tell her "They'll be fine, you've raised them well," Leanne's response is "I know, but it doesn't stop me worrying about them".

She often says "oh well, that's me. You know it helps me to worry because I come up with ideas on how to help or fix something".

Leanne works part-time (3 days per week) as a bookkeeper and she loves sewing, cooking, and entertaining friends on the weekend. She is very sociable, and in recent years has enjoyed many weekends away with her girlfriends participating in winery tours, music events, dinners, and spa retreats. It often takes Leanne a lot of convincing from her friends to go out as she tends to be a bit nervous about leaving the family, especially if there is something going on for them. Thoughts run through her head such as: "if I don't go, they might not ask me again" and "what if something happens in the family while I'm away enjoying myself?" Somehow the girlfriends always manage to persuade her to come, and she is glad when she does go. It helps that they always go to the same place, that is not too far from home. She always tells herself, "If anything happens at least I can get home quickly."

Despite being very busy socialising Leanne manages to keep an immaculate house doing all the housework alone. She is in a very 'traditional' marriage where she does all the inside housework, and Jim does the outside. However, Leanne also enjoys gardening and often mows the lawn or replants part of the garden. Jim rarely helps with meals or cleaning and occasionally Leanne gets very upset about that. She even has to prepare meals for Jim and Tom when she goes away for a weekend with her

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friends. If she doesn't, they complain, and she worries that she is not being a good wife and mother. She has tried to ask Jim to help more, but he says he likes her doing things for him because she is a better cook and he's hopeless at cooking.

Leanne is always concerned that their marriage will break down if she doesn't look after Jim.

Leanne's mother Gillian has very bad arthritis and often requires assistance at home on her more painful days. Gillian also likes Leanne to go with her to medical appointments to make sure she understands instructions about medications and care. Although Gillian shops weekly for herself she regularly calls on Leanne to help with shopping too because she likes the company, and it means she has help lifting heavier items. Leanne enjoys supporting her mother although at times she wishes her younger brothers could help more. This frustration is another thing that keeps her up at night worrying. She wants to raise it with her brothers but the few times she has they have said they are too busy to help but have offered to do weekend house maintenance jobs for their mum. Leanne often finds herself having conversations in her head with her brothers, going over various scenarios of how she can tackle the conversation with them and how she can convince them to change their mind. After exhausting herself thinking about it she just says to herself "it's no good they won't change, I'll just have to do it myself".

It is common for Leanne to only sleep 4-5 hours a night as she often wakes up worrying about work or thinking about everything, she has to do the following day. She knows it is no good worrying, but she just can't seem to control it. She wakes in the early morning, starts thinking and then can't stop. She rarely goes back to sleep and just powers through the next day feeling exhausted. For the past twelve months Leanne has been taking vitamins, but she really doesn't think they help much. Over the years her general practitioner has suggested meditation to control her worry, however every time she has tried this it doesn't work. Instead of listening to the guided meditation or tuning in to nice calming music, her mind is too busy thinking.

Recently Leanne has been having very bad headaches and regular stomach pain. Even though her husband thinks it's just irritable bowel syndrome from all her worry, Leanne is concerned it might be cancer. She's feeling quite exhausted as she is also experiencing post-menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes at night that have added to her normal waking periods from worrying. She was recently talking to her best friend Vanessa about all her headaches and stomach pain, and Vanessa suggested she go to her GP and see if she can give her something to help her sleep. Vanessa said, "at least if you get some good sleep, you might not feel so bad and it might help you not to worry so much."