

## Features

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# PIS Talking Risk



## Death in Australia | 2008 A Review

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released its data for the 2008 year on the leading causes of deaths in Australia. In 2008, 143,946 Australians died. When it comes to who died of what, it can be divided quite clearly into 'winners' and 'losers': how Australians are dying.

Almost 9,000 died from 'external causes' ie accidents or misadventure. 'Internal causes' ie disease makes up the massive majority of causes of death in Australia.

### The Top 3

1. Heart disease is still the biggest killer, responsible for 16 per cent of all deaths in 2008, despite a decline over the past ten years. In the 1999 data, 22 per cent of all deaths were from heart disease, so mortality is improving in this respect, probably due to greater public awareness of the risks associated with certain lifestyle choices, better methods of early detection, and improved treatment options. Cardiovascular diseases killed over 48,000 people in 2008.



2. The second leading cause of death was cancer, with over 42,000 people succumbing in Australia during 2008.  
3. Dementia and Alzheimer's disease, however, doubled their victims over the same period. Deaths from dementia and Alzheimer's disease is now a more prevalent cause of death than trachea and lung cancers, which are the fourth

largest cause of death in Australia. Suicide and car accidents claimed over 2,000 people, over three-quarters of them males, and was the tenth leading cause of death for males, and fourteenth overall.

### Month of Death



It seems that the most popular month to die in 2008 was August, but every year, June, July and August have the highest mortality rates in Australia.

### Death Rates

Death rates per year remain steady year on year, but are slowly creeping up due to the increase in Australia's population, but overall in relation to population, death rates are decreasing.

### Age-Related Death Rates

The safest age to be is somewhere between five years and 14 years. The risk of death increases from age 15 for males and females, but if you are older than 85, males are more likely to die sooner.

Male risk of death increases gradually up until around age 40-44, where it accelerates until the older age groups, however the female death rate for those aged 15 onwards is low and

constant up until age 29, then starts to increase past 35 years.

### Married or Not?

It has long been observed that married people live longer, and the latest stats from the ABS show that married men live longer than widowed men, and widowed women live longer than married women. Go figure!



There have been two legitimate suggestions put forward as to why married people live longer. The first is that married people take care of one another and nurture one another's health more, as well as participating less in risky behaviour, and the second suggestion is that the differentials are due to the idea that perhaps those who choose a life partner choose a healthier one. Registered marriage in Australia is not universal, therefore the ABS states 'selectivity is likely to be an important factor'.

### Infant Deaths

There were just over 1,000 infant deaths in Australia in 2008 (an infant being a child of less than a year of age), which is an increase of 1.9 per

cent over 2007. 100 years ago one in 12 children wouldn't make it past their first birthday, but now the rate is 1 in 240: a significant improvement. That is 4.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. In only 1988, it was 8.7 per cent. Improvements in infant mortality have been put down to better sanitation, food supplies, medical treatment and early detection of abnormalities.

### Who is the most likely to die?

Australian residents born in Australia, the United States, New Zealand or Western European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands had around the same death rates.

However those from Southern European countries like Italy and Greece had lower rates of death, and south-east and north-east Asian countries had the lowest rates. Japanese-born and Malaysian-born Australian residents had low rates of death in Australia, but Chinese-born Australian residents had the very lowest rate with 44 per cent lower rate than for Australian-born residents.

Source | *Risk Minder*

## Strange Mental Illnesses

Here are some strange but very real mental illnesses that will leave you wondering how anyone makes it through this life in any state of mental 'health' at all: there are just so many things that can, and regularly do, go wrong.

### Foreign Accent Syndrome



This rare syndrome may occur after trauma, head injury or stroke where the speech centre of the brain is affected, and the individual starts to speak their native language with an accent. The chosen accent varies.

### The Living Dead - Cotard's Syndrome

Sufferers of Cotard's Syndrome believe that they are dead, with putrefying internal organs and the belief that the internal organs and/or blood has been lost. It can sometimes include delusions of immortality. This condition was first

described in 1880, but didn't get any real scientific consideration until 2007.

### Tasting Letters - Synesthesia

Synesthesia is not really a mental health problem as such, more just an abnormality 'weird thing' that some people experience. Synesthetes usually enjoy their 'illness' as it provides another way of experiencing words, food, colours and sounds. A synesthete might see colours around letters, numbers, or foods - a colour can be tasted, a letter can be felt, among other combinations of the senses. One man loves to eat roast chicken with vanilla ice cream because he likes the colours it makes - a shade of blue. Each person's experience is unique.



### Intimate Imposter - Capgras Delusion

Schizophrenics may experience this delusion: the sufferer is convinced that a family member or spouse has been replaced with an identical imposter, but a person who is unrelated in any way. The 'imposter' gets the cold shoulder and normal activities such as sleeping in the same bed or eating meals together are halted, as the sufferer believes that the person is pretending.

### Same person in disguise - Fregoli Delusion

Fregoli Delusion involves a person believing that several different people are in fact the same person in disguise, and the disguised person is doing it deliberately to trick the sufferer.

### Reduplicative Paramnesia

This condition causes a person to believe that a locale has been replicated, and exists in two or more places simultaneously, or that this particular location has been 'relocated' some place else. The person may completely understand the irrationality of what they're saying, ie "I understand that it is impossible or unlikely for the same place to exist within two places" but still believes it.

### Munchausen Syndrome

One of the more well-known disorders of

our time, a cousin of hypochondria, is Munchausen Syndrome. A person will create, invent or exaggerate symptoms of a disease or disorder to get attention and sympathy. An auxiliary disorder, Munchausen Biproxy Syndrome, is a disorder where a sufferer harms other people, such as their children, to get attention. One of the most famous cases of this syndrome was Sarena Sherrard who injected faecal matter into her toddler, with the resulting poor health of the child gaining Sarena a great deal of attention and sympathy.

### Amputate me! - Apotemnophilia or BIID

BIID stands for Body Integrity Identity Disorder, or Amputee Identity Disorder and sufferers have the overwhelming need to amputate healthy limbs or other body parts. Sometimes they may amputate their own body parts. A related condition is acrotomophilia, where the sufferer has a strong sexual attraction to people who are missing limbs. The two conditions are sometimes found in the same person.

### Fear of genital retraction - Koro

Koro is a frightening problem that comes on very suddenly and is very intense in the belief that a person's genitalia, will suddenly retract into the body causing death. This problem doesn't just affect one person - it has hit southeast Asia in waves, causing mass hysteria.

### Alien Hand Syndrome

Alien Hand Syndrome is a disorder where a stroke, brain tumour, or brain injury causes the person to be unable to control the movements of one of their hands. This can be terrifying for the sufferer, who feels that their hand is being controlled by a force outside of themselves. The movements can be compulsive unbuttoning, taking off clothes or manipulation of objects. This disorder can be relieved slightly by giving the hand something to hold, such as a ball. Keeping it occupied, essentially.

Mental conditions such as these show that our amazingly built, intricate bodies are subject to some interesting forces inside and outside of ourselves that can severely hinder our lives.

Source | *Risk Minder*