

Professional help

If you are concerned about your phobias please go to your GP for advice. Your GP may provide you with information and guidance for self-help, a referral for a talking therapy with the Emotional Health Service or medication in some cases.

Helpful websites

www.nomorepanic.co.uk

www.elefriends.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/phobias

Contact

The Emotional Health Service

42 York Street, Twickenham TW1 3BW

T: 020 8487 5470

Opening hours:

Monday to Thursday: 8.45am to 5.00pm

Friday: 8.45am to 4.45 pm

W: www.afcinfo.org.uk/emotionalhealthservice

Emotional Health Service



Phobias

Information for young people

What are phobias?

A phobia is a type of anxiety that describes an intense fear of something. Phobias are different to regular fears for several different reasons.

- They are fears that are out of proportion to the danger
- They last for more than six months
- They have a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life

Examples of phobias can include:

- **Animals:** such as dogs and spiders
- **Environmental:** such as heights, water and germs
- **Situational:** such as flying on planes or going to the dentist
- **Bodily:** such as blood and vomit

If you recognise that your fears interfere with your everyday life or keep you from doing things you would otherwise enjoy you should seek help for them.

What causes phobias?

The reasons why you might develop a phobia are likely to be individual to you. Here are a few factors that may influence the development of phobias.

- **Stressful events:** if you have had a terrifying experience you are more likely to develop a phobia related to this traumatic event. For example, if you have been badly bitten by a dog you are more likely to develop a phobia of dogs.
- **Learnt fears:** if you have been taught to fear something in your environment by an overprotective or anxious carer you are more likely to be fearful of that thing.
- **Long-term stress:** if you are experiencing a stressful period of time in your life such as the separation of your parents or a recent bereavement you are more likely to experience anxiety which could turn into a specific phobia.

Signs and symptoms of phobias

The way that individuals with phobias respond to the thing they are phobic about is similar to the way everyone responds to serious threats. You may feel like you want to run away or avoid the situation when you come across the thing you are phobic about. When confronted by their phobia, people feel extremely anxious and, as a result, experience some uncomfortable bodily sensations. Sometimes even the thought of a particular thing is enough to make someone feel anxious. People often describe being aware that their phobia can cause them very little harm (such as house spiders) however still find it very difficult to overcome their fear.

Symptoms may include:

- feeling dizzy
- feeling sick
- shortness of breath
- sweating
- increase heart rate

What can I do about my phobias?

Some people are able to reduce the impact their phobias have on their lives without help from a professional. Here are some suggestions of ways you may be able to help yourself to cope and eventually reduce the impact of your phobias.

- **Talk to someone you trust:** if someone can be with you and understand what is happening to you when you face the thing you fear, this may help you to manage your anxiety and tackle your phobia
- **Relax in the moment:** focus on your breathing or your body when you are around the thing that causes you anxiety
- **Prepare yourself for the challenge:** set a goal for how long you will be around the thing you are fearful of, make sure that nothing else in the moment will cause you any anxiety (such as being in a big group of people you) and reward yourself if you are able to reach your time goal
- **Find a support group:** you can find these online (see back of leaflet for details)