



# DEALING WITH PHOBIAS

With Halloween over, many of us are now getting back to our normal day-to-day life after eating more treats than we should have and getting more scares than we wanted to. During the bulk of the month of October, fear becomes a commodity to be consumed and enjoyed. However, for many people who live with a phobia of specific objects, places, or situations, fear is anything but fun and actually hinders daily functioning.

## What is a Phobia?

A phobia is an extreme and usually irrational fear of an object, animal, or situation. The individual copes by avoiding the thing that they are afraid of leading to significant disruption in everyday life.

## Different Forms of Phobias

Many of us have come to associate phobias with an extreme, debilitating fear of an animal or an object like needles; however, phobias can also manifest as other forms of anxiety. According to Medscape, an online resource for health-care professionals, phobic disorders may be diagnosed as either of the three (and possibly several other) form of anxiety disorders.

- **Specific Phobias** manifest as an intense fear of specific objects or situations, such as elevators or heights, specific animals, needles and blood etc.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder** involves fear of social, interpersonal situations.
- **Agoraphobia** involves fear and avoidance of public places.

## Common Symptoms to Look Out for

Many symptoms of phobias are identical to symptoms of anxiety. One key difference is that in the case of phobias, the anxious feelings tend to be triggered by the presence of a specific object or situation.

Most of these symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- **Raised heart beat and breathing rate**
- **Shaking or tremors**
- **Feeling nauseous, having a queasy stomach**
- **Dizziness or feeling faint**
- **Feeling emotionally overwhelmed and upset**
- **Feeling a strong need to escape from the situation or object**



## Getting the Support You Need for Phobias

It is important to get support if phobias frequently begin to disrupt your daily life. It is always pivotal to first consult your doctor and counsellor/psychologist before choosing any treatment option.

### Medications:

In some cases, a doctor may prescribe beta blockers, anti-depressants, or sedatives to help combat some of the anxiety symptoms that are triggered by a phobia. Most of the time, these medications will not be used as a stand-alone treatment but in combination with counselling.

### Therapy:

Another more common and oftentimes preferred treatment option for phobias is counselling or psychotherapy. While several different counselling methods may come handy in combatting phobias, counsellors are more likely to use either or both Exposure Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

**Exposure Therapy** involves exposing the individual to the source of their phobia in small, gradual steps. The individual only moves to the next step once they have learned to overcome their fear at each of the previous steps.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** is used in conjunction with Exposure Therapy. CBT provides individuals with tools to contest and replace their negative thoughts about the feared object with different, more constructive beliefs.

### Self-help

In addition to using psychotherapy (and medications if needed), it is always a good idea to practice regular self-care. This will not only feel empowering but the chances of success in treatment are far greater when you are committed towards taking care of the self.

Here are some self-care options:

- Get regular exercise, such as walking, jogging, dancing, and engaging in sports in nature.
- Talk to family and friends that you trust.
- Listen to calming music and practice mindfulness or deep breathing exercises, such as inhaling, holding the breath, and then exhaling to counts of 4.
- Read and practice tools in books like "The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook" by Edmund J. Bourne, or "Freedom from Fear: Overcoming Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic" by Howard Leibgold.

