

Condition:



Phobias

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What is a phobia?

A phobia is a specific type of anxiety disorder which is an extreme form of fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as going outside) or object (such as spiders), even when there is no danger. It has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life.

Consider getting treatment for your phobia if:

- It causes intense and disabling fear, anxiety or panic
- You recognise that your fear is out of proportion to the danger
- You avoid certain situations and places because of your phobia
- Your avoidance interferes with your normal routine or causes significant distress
- It stops you getting support for other health problems – for example, it stops you using the phone or seeing the doctor
- You've had the phobia for at least six months

Phobias can develop around any object or situation, and some people may have multiple phobias. They can be roughly categorised into two groups:

Specific phobias

These are phobias about a specific object or situation, such as spiders or flying. They often develop in childhood or adolescence and for some people they will lessen as they get older.

Complex phobias

Complex phobias tend to have a more disruptive or disabling impact on your life than specific phobias. They tend to develop when you are an adult. Two of the most common complex phobias are social phobia and agoraphobia.

10 most common phobias

Agoraphobia: Fear of open spaces

Claustrophobia: Fear of confined spaces

Acrophobia: Fear of heights

Mysophobia: Fear of being contaminated

Xenophobia: Fear of strangers

Necrophobia: Fear of death/dead things

Brontophobia: Fear of thunder/lightning

Carcinophobia: Fear of cancer

Aviophobia: Fear of flying

Arachnophobia: Fear of spiders

Phobias and work

You may feel you have had to live with a phobia, taking great care to avoid the object or situation you are afraid of. However, if you do this it will create additional challenges at work with you continually trying to avoid what you are afraid of. This will make your situation worse. It is worth a visit to your GP and seeking help as most phobias are manageable with the right treatment.

Top tips to help manage your phobias in the workplace

- **Be realistic about what you can do.** If your fear is confined spaces then avoid tasks or roles that would involve this until you have conquered this anxiety.
- **Tell someone you trust** in the workplace as this can feel comforting and supportive.
- **Ask for help and support** if you need it from management or colleagues – consider if small role adjustments could help.
- **Take advantage of employee benefits.** Your workplace may offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which could offer confidential counselling without a long waiting list.
- **Practice techniques to manage the phobias.** Mindfulness, relaxation and breathing are all helpful.
- **If you are taking medication ensure you take this regularly** in order for you to manage your physical and emotional wellbeing.

How do I know if I have a phobia?

What does it feel like?

Phobias are not usually formally diagnosed. Most people with a phobia are fully aware of the problem.

Phobias can feel different for different people and the symptoms can vary in severity. Symptoms involve experiencing intense fear and anxiety when faced with the situation or object that you are afraid of, but this will not be all the time and there are a number of tips to help manage your phobia and the anxiety that it may cause for you.

What causes phobias?

There does not seem to be one particular cause of phobias, but there are several factors that may play an important role:

- Particular incidents or traumas
- Learned responses
- Genetics
- Responses to panic or fear
- Long-term stress

Talking to your GP or another health care provider about your phobias

It is worth going to see your GP to see what support is available to you to help manage your phobia. Although it can be a little difficult to talk about how you are feeling and the effect it is having, your GP or health care provider will understand this. They may refer you to a specialist with expertise in behavioural therapy, such as a psychologist.

Treatments for phobias

Treating complex phobias often involves talking therapies such as:

Counselling	Psychotherapy	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
Short-term talking therapy	Long-term therapy	Talking therapy that can help you manage your problems

Medication is not usually used to treat phobias; however it is sometimes prescribed to help people cope with the effects of anxiety caused by the phobias. Medications that may be used include antidepressants or tranquilizers.

Managing your phobias

In all types of phobias, symptoms may be eased by lifestyle changes, such as:



Healthy diet

This can help give you the energy and vitamins your body needs, helping you feel the best you can. Eliminate caffeine and cut down on alcohol.



Be Active

Even a walk around the block or cutting through the park, will help boost special chemicals in the brain called endorphins which make us feel better.



Reduce stress

Try to recognise when this is happening. Become more mindful in trying to change the thoughts and learn more about what makes you stressed.



Sleep

A good night's sleep is so important to your health and wellbeing. A tip for a good night's sleep is to remove phones, screens, iPads and the television from the bedroom. Plus there is nothing like a nice clean bed with clean sheets to help aid a good night's sleep.



Connect

Talk about how you are feeling. Share a cup of tea with others. Sharing always makes things feel better.



Take Notice: Relaxation techniques

These can help you to manage the anxiety you feel as a result of your phobia. There are many different relaxation techniques available, ranging from meditation to control stretching and breathing. The links included at the end of this fact sheet will provide more information on relaxation techniques.

Useful links

Helplines

Triumph over
Phobia

01225 571740

Anxiety
UK

0844 477 5774