What Are Phobias?

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What You Need to Know About Phobias

Fear itself is a natural feeling that is completely normal — and even healthy. It is the natural way our brain signals us for possible danger and triggers our instincts of self-preservation.

We are trained to deal with fears and accept them as a natural part of our lives, but it's different when we talk about irrational fears and phobias. A phobia is a when a person experiences deep and intense (often irrational) fear of something.

The problem with phobias is that often people with certain phobias experience such intense fear that it makes them change their normal lifestyle. If you have several things in your life that cause you intense irrational fear, and you start change your life because of it, you have developed a phobia.

What Causes Your Phobia?

In most cases phobias appear in early childhood or adulthood and rarely after the age of 30. Here are some of the most common factors that may cause phobias:

- Severe brain injuries
- Certain medications
- Stressful events (car accident, nearly drowning, severe injuries)
- People with relatives suffering from anxiety disorders are at high risk of phobias

Different Types of Phobias

Phobias can be divided in two major groups: complex and simple phobias. Simple phobias are irrational fears about a specific situation, animal, or activity.

On the other hand, complex phobias are related to more intense fear and/or anxiety. This can include fear of certain circumstances, places, or situations. Here are some of the most common phobias that we know of:

Simple Phobias

- **Fear of spiders:** Arachnophobia
- **Fear of dogs:** Cynophobia
- **Fear of flying:** Aviophobia
- **Fear of snakes:** Ophidiophobia
- **Fear of heights:** Acrophobia

Complex Phobias

- **Social phobia:** A social phobia (also known today as social anxiety disorder) is a condition in which a person experiences intense fear in different social situations. This can include meeting new people, public speaking, performing on a stage, eating or drinking in public. This phobia can dramatically change your lifestyle and eventually lead to isolation.

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Different Types of Phobias

- **Agoraphobia:** The word “agoraphobia” itself means fear of open spaces. This can include crowded places, supermarket, theaters, concerts, etc. Often people with agoraphobia avoid these situations and places, as they think they could trigger another panic attack. In severe cases, people with agoraphobia do not leave their homes.

Symptoms of Phobias

The symptoms of a phobia — and their intensity — can vary as there are many types of known phobias. However, the most common symptom of phobia is a panic attack. If you're having a panic attack you may feel:

- Shaking or trembling
- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Racing heartbeat
- As if you have no control over the situation
- As if you are dying
- Dry mouth

How to Treat Phobias

Even though phobias are unpleasant, they are very common and highly treatable. If, for example, you are afraid of snakes, it won't affect your life too much as you likely don't encounter them often.

On the other hand, complex phobias such as agoraphobia and social phobia need your attention. These are conditions that can dramatically change your lifestyle and daily routine and lead to complete isolation in the most severe cases.

Treatment is different for each individual, and for each kind of phobia — there is no one unique treatment used. However, there are some basic steps you can take in order to cope with your fear:

- **Face your fears:** This is the most common method for self-help when you are dealing with phobias. The key factor here is to face your fear as you gradually expose yourself to the situation that triggers your phobia, and you'll eventually become desensitized to it.
- **Learn to relax:** Stress is a huge issue with anxiety. To learn how to cope with your phobia you will have to manage some relaxation techniques, including exercise, meditation, and breathing techniques.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** This is one of the most common methods for treating phobias. A therapist will help you develop strategies to cope with your phobia by examining how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors all affect each other.
- **Hypnosis:** Hypnosis is gaining popularity as a method of dealing with phobias and anxiety disorders. According to studies, hypnosis is extremely useful with treating panic attacks, phobias, sleep disorders, and stress.