

Phobic Disorder

What is a Phobic Disorder?

Specific phobia is characterised by a marked fear of a particular object or situation. Individuals with specific phobia experience intense anxiety when faced with the feared object or situation and actively avoid such encounters. Five phobia subtypes are typically specified: animal, natural environment, blood/injection/injury, situational, and 'other', comprising low-prevalence phobias such as the fear of choking (phagophobia) or the fear of vomiting (emetophobia).

What causes Phobic Disorder?

Genetic and environmental factors can cause phobias. Children who have a close relative with an anxiety disorder are at risk for developing a phobia. Distressing events such as nearly drowning can bring on a phobia. Exposure to confined spaces, extreme heights, and animal or insect bites can all be sources of phobias. People with ongoing medical conditions or health concerns often have phobias. There is a high incidence of people developing phobias after traumatic brain injuries. Substance abuse and depression are also connected to phobias.

Do I have Phobic Disorder?

The most common and disabling symptom of a phobia is a panic attack. Features of a panic attack include:

- pounding or racing heart
- shortness of breath
- rapid speech or inability to speak
- dry mouth
- upset stomach or nausea
- elevated blood pressure
- trembling or shaking
- chest pain or tightness
- choking sensation
- dizziness or lightheadedness
- profuse sweating
- sense of impending doom

A person with a phobia doesn't have to have panic attacks for accurate diagnosis.

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What can I do?

How a psychologist can help

If the individual is experiencing significant distress or functional impairment as a result of their symptoms or avoidance, psychological assistance may be required. Assessment of specific phobia would include an account of the onset and development of symptoms, course, current symptoms, skill deficits, medical issues, and comorbid psychological conditions, amongst other matters. Self-report measures and semi-structured interviews might be used.

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This information was sourced from the Australian Psychological Society

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