

Social Phobia

What is Social Phobia?

It's perfectly normal to feel nervous in social situations where we might come under the attention of others, whether they're strangers or people we know. Attending a formal function, giving a speech at a wedding, doing a presentation to work colleagues are likely to cause nervousness and anxiety, both in the lead-up and during the event.

However, for people with social phobia (sometimes known as social anxiety disorder), performing in front of others and social situations can lead to intense anxiety. They may fear being judged, criticised, laughed at or humiliated in front of others, even in the most ordinary, everyday situations. For example, the prospect of eating in front of others at a restaurant can be daunting for some people with social phobia.

Social phobia may occur in the lead up to or during in:

- performance situations (such as having to give a speech or being watched while doing something at work)
- situations involving social interaction (such as having a meal with friends, or making small talk).

Social phobia can also be specific; where people fear a specific situation or a few situations related to a specific fear (such as being assertive at work or with their friends).

What causes Social Phobia?

There are a number of causes of social phobia, including:

- **Temperament** – Adolescents who are shy or socially inhibited are particularly at risk. In children, clingy behaviour, shyness, crying easily and excessive timidity may indicate temperaments that could possibly put them at risk of developing social phobia.
- **Family history** – Social phobia can run in the family, in part because of a possible genetic predisposition.
- **Learned behaviour/environment** – Some people with social phobia attribute the development of the condition to being poorly treated, publicly embarrassed or humiliated (e.g. being bullied at school).

Do I have Social Phobia?

Common symptoms of social anxiety include physical symptoms and psychological symptoms. The physical symptoms that can be particularly distressing for people with social phobia include:

- excessive perspiration
- trembling
- blushing or stammering when trying to speak

- nausea or diarrhoea.

These physical symptoms often cause further anxiety as the person fears others will notice – even though these signs are usually barely noticeable to those around them.

People with social phobia also worry excessively that they will do or say the wrong thing and that something terrible will happen as a result.

People with social phobia try to avoid situations where they fear acting in a way that's humiliating or embarrassing. If avoidance isn't possible, they endure the situation but can become extremely anxious and distressed and may try to leave the situation as soon as they can. This can have a serious negative effect on their personal relationships, professional lives and ability to go about their daily routine.

A diagnosis of social phobia is based on having the typical symptoms, which cause significant distress or impairment of day-to-day functioning, and the symptoms are persistent for example at least six months.

Have you felt very nervous or embarrassed when faced with social situations or events? For example:

- meeting unfamiliar people
- being observed (e.g. eating, drinking, talking on the phone or writing in front of others)
- performing in front of others

Have you avoided a situation because of your phobia? For example, have you:

- not gone to certain interactions or events
- found it hard to go about your daily life (e.g. working, studying or seeing friends and family) because you are trying to avoid such situations?

If yes, you may be experiencing social phobia.

What can I do?

Social phobia is treatable and seeking professional support is the first step to recovery. There are two main types of effective treatments for social phobia; psychological treatments will generally be the first line of treatment. In some severe cases, medication can also be effective

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