

What are you SO scared of?



Phobias can creep into our lives in childhood or in adulthood, leaving us feeling as though we are hostages to them. Phobias can develop over time, gradually intensifying and crippling the sufferer with panic and sometimes even causing terrifying panic attacks or people can find themselves suddenly overcome with fear in an everyday situation or when confronted by a familiar scene that has never troubled them before.

When trapped in this frightening place, it is understandable that people can begin to feel hopeless, helpless and deeply unhappy. But phobias can be overcome. Lives can be rediscovered. The sun can shine brightly again. Hypnotherapy is one way to break through the darkness laying the foundations for a future without fear – and the great thing is that you get to learn a new set of skills and bring those positive changes to your own life.

Fear or phobia?

Not every fear will become a phobia. Fears arise at different stages and it is very common to have a couple of minor fears that mildly interfere with life for a while; for example, many children are afraid of the dark up to the age of around 6 requiring an open door or nightlight and this is perfectly normal. If you get food poisoning, you might be more cautious of that food or restaurant for a while. But a phobia is much more than a simple fear. When you have an exaggerated or unrealistic sense of danger about a situation (eg. blood test) or object (eg. balloon) or begin to organise life around avoiding the things you are afraid of, you are probably experiencing a phobia. Phobia comes from the Greek, meaning 'morbid fear'.

Your fear may be a phobia if:

- coming into contact, or even just the thought of coming into contact, with the cause of your discomfort creates anxiety and/or intense and disabling fear and/or panic
- you know that it is irrational and excessive but feel powerless against it
- you avoid certain situations and places as a result of your discomfort
- your avoidance interferes with your normal routine, job/school/studies and social life
- your avoidance causes significant distress to yourself and your loved ones

What phobias do people have?

Absolutely anything and everything! Some phobias are more common than others although the physical and emotional responses are generally similar for all phobias and they respond to treatment in similar ways. For the most part, phobias involve animals, objects, places, situations and the body's functions or medical interventions: dogs, spiders, snakes, balloons, water, enclosed spaces, dentist visits, storms, heights, flying, vomit and injections are amongst the most prevalent phobias. However, there are many, many more. Don't let your phobia imprison you and don't resist seeking help just because you think it's unusual – you will not be alone in suffering from it, whatever it is.

What does having a phobia feel like?

Phobias affect different people to different intensities. Some people experience only mild anxiety while others experience severe anxiety and some even suffer from panic attacks.

When there is a real threat to your safety, anxiety is triggered as part of your natural, instinctive, protective programming causing your body to 'freeze' and then release adrenaline and cortisol to prepare you for 'fight or flight'. When you have a phobia, your triggers get confused and you react as though a raging (and very hungry!) lion were standing right in front of you despite there being no actual threat to your safety. This creates a massive neuro-chemical response and you will experience some or all of the following physical symptoms:

- Chest pain or tightness
- Trembling, tingling or shaking
- Dizziness and light-headedness
- Breathlessness, difficulty breathing or hyperventilating
- Racing or pounding heart
- Cold clammy skin and sweating
- Flushing and feeling of warmth or cold
- Dry mouth with difficulty in speaking and swallowing or sensation of lump in throat
- Abdominal discomfort - churning
- Increased blood glucose levels
- Headache, back ache and neck pain
- Brain fog

After a few moments you may also notice:

- Feeling an overwhelming anxiety or panic
- Feeling an intense need to escape
- Feeling 'unreal' or detached from yourself
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
- Feeling like you're going to die or pass out

These symptoms then lead you to feeling even more anxious, resulting in the body releasing

How can hypnotherapy help?

Hypnotherapy is a gentle, non-invasive and proven way to give you an increasing sense of control over your phobia. Hypnosis itself is not the therapy but it enables the unconscious mind to be receptive to the therapeutic work which will result in you feeling considerably less anxious causing the phobia to begin to lose its power. Alongside this, you will learn relaxation techniques to reverse the effects of anxiety so that instead of preparing your body for 'fight or flight' you can help it to slow down, regain calm, lower blood pressure and limit the amount of adrenaline and cortisol that is released.

even more neuro-chemicals and this can cause a full-blown panic attack, making you feel out of control and overwhelmed. Afterwards, you may feel exhausted, depressed and embarrassed. At this point, avoidance can set in making the phobia more and more powerful in your life.

The impact on loved ones can be significant, causing them to either 'push' you into difficult situations to help you overcome your phobia or to become an accomplice in your avoidance to protect you from your distress. And of course, their lives become limited by your restrictions.

What causes a phobia?

Some phobias are simple and others are more complex. There isn't one particular known cause. Phobia can be linked to a particular incident or trauma so being on a flight which encounters serious turbulence or an emergency landing might lead to a phobia about flying. Phobia can be a learned response, developed in the early years of life. We know that children can develop the same phobia as a parent or older sibling and this is very common for fear of dogs and dentist visits. Having parents and carers who are very worried or anxious can have a significant effect on the way children cope with anxiety in later life. Sometimes an underlying medical condition which affects cortisol, adrenaline or hormone levels can make you more susceptible to anxiety – if you are concerned about this you should consult your GP or another medically qualified professional.

Complex phobias, such as social phobia and agoraphobia, often start later in life perhaps during puberty, late teens, early twenties and beyond. Sometimes, complex phobias have continued for many years and sufferers feel totally desperate. However, there are treatments that work for children, young people and adults alike and hypnotherapy is one of those.

Who says it works?

A 'Clinical Review' of hypnosis and relaxation therapies published in the British Medical Journal looked at research on hypnosis and concluded: **'There is good evidence from randomised controlled trials that both hypnosis and relaxation techniques can reduce anxiety'**. The same report also concludes that hypnosis is proven to be effective in treating panic attacks and phobia (Vickers & Zollman, 'Hypnosis and relaxation therapies,' BMJ 1999;319: 1346-1349). The Which? Guide to Complementary Therapies, 2002, states **'Hypnotherapy is supported by more scientific research than any other complementary therapy'**. The NHS uses hypnotherapy to help people suffering with anxiety in some centres in the UK. You can ask your GP to refer you for hypnotherapy, although sadly it is not yet widely available on the NHS in Sussex.

Who should I trust?

There are many different hypnotherapy qualifications and it can be a minefield knowing where to turn. The Department of Health has set up the CNHC register for complementary therapists who meet the National Occupational Standards in their training and abide by a strict Code of Ethics in their practice. The CNHC register allows GPs, hospitals, private healthcare providers and insurance companies to refer patients to hypnotherapy practitioners or to make hypnotherapy more readily available in health centres, clinics, doctors' surgeries and hospitals.

Imagine how great life will be when you have experienced your breakthrough from the chains of that old phobia.

Go on - what are you waiting for?

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Sharie is a friendly, fully qualified, CNHC & GHR registered/accredited and experienced professional cognitive hypno/psychotherapist based in Hove & Haywards Heath. Sharie is continuing further professional training at the Tavistock NHS Clinic in London. She is not a medical doctor.

Sharie uses an integrative mix of solution-focused, clinical and cognitive hypnotherapy, psychotherapy, CBT and NLP. With full CRB clearance and up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the most effective techniques, she will help you to bring about the changes you have identified.

What now?

You can find the CNHC register at www.cnhc.org.uk. A good hypnotherapist will not judge you and will offer you a free consultation to make sure you like their manner and that you both feel confident that hypnosis might help you. Make sure they are knowledgeable and experienced in working with phobia and check they are fully insured. It is important to ensure the therapist works well with children and young people if the person suffering is under 18.



Together, we can achieve your goals and probably more quickly than you think

Imagine how great life will be *without* those negative thoughts, unwanted habits, anxieties, phobias, episodes of panic or painful, traumatic memories

Hypnotherapy can help relieve distress and enhance your personal life and performance at work. The BMA approved its use for therapy in 1955.

Call Dr Sharie Coombes today on 01273 252559 or visit the website: www.breakthroughdays.co.uk

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