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## Phobias: How They Develop, Common Myths, and How Hypnotherapy Can Help

A friendly guide for people wanting to understand phobias (and what may help)

A phobia can feel bigger than your situation—so even when you know you “shouldn’t” be afraid, your body reacts strongly anyway. The good news is that phobias are understandable, treatable, and help is available.

This handout explains what phobias are, how they can develop, myths and FAQs, and how hypnotherapy may support healing.

What is a phobia?

A phobia is an intense, persistent fear of a specific object, situation, or activity. For many people, the fear is out of proportion to the actual danger.

Phobias often cause:

- Physical symptoms (racing heart, sweating, nausea, shaky feeling)
- Mental symptoms (panic thoughts, “What if it happens?”, dread)
- Avoidance behaviours (skipping situations, changing routes, needing “safe” support)

There are different types, including:

- Specific phobias (e.g., spiders, heights, flying, injections)
- Social phobia (fear of embarrassment or judgment in social settings)
- Agoraphobia (fear of being in situations where escape or help might feel difficult)

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How phobias develop (in simple terms)

Phobias usually develop through a mix of learning, brain “alarm” patterns, and personal experience. Common routes include:

1) A scary or stressful experience

If something unpleasant happens once (or a few times), your brain may connect the fear to the trigger. For example: a bad experience at a dentist can later lead to fear of dental visits—even if the current appointment is safe.

2) Learning from others Watching someone react with fear (parents, friends, media) can teach your brain that

the situation is dangerous—especially if you’re already sensitive to anxiety.

3) A “false alarm” from your threat system

Sometimes your nervous system misfires. Your body learns a “this feels dangerous” pattern, even when there’s no real threat present. Over time, the fear becomes stronger because the body keeps preparing for danger.

4) Avoidance makes the fear grow

Avoidance can offer short-term relief, which teaches your brain: “Avoiding worked, so the fear must be real.” That relief strengthens avoidance and can make the phobia bigger over time.

5) Increased anxiety in general

If you already run higher on anxiety, you may be more likely to interpret sensations (like dizziness or shortness of breath) as signs of danger—making the fear spiral.

What the phobia pattern feels like

A common cycle looks like this:

1. Trigger appears (or you imagine it)

2. Your body signals danger

3. Fear spikes

4. You avoid or escape

5. Relief happens

6. Your brain remembers “avoidance = safety,” and the loop strengthens

Breaking that loop is usually the key to healing.

How hypnotherapy may help with phobias

Hypnotherapy is a guided process that helps you enter a focused, relaxed state. In that state, many people find it easier to work on the fear response—especially the automatic fear pattern in the mind and body.

Hypnotherapy support may include:

1) Calming the body’s threat response

Hypnotherapy can help you practice returning to a calmer state—so your body learns it doesn’t have to react as intensely to the trigger.2) Reworking fear memories and learned associations

Many phobias are tied to learned connections. Hypnotherapy may help you revisit the story your mind has built around the trigger, and gradually create a more helpful new association.

3) Changing internal “alarm” thoughts

People often have automatic predictions like “I’ll lose control” or “This is dangerous.” Hypnotherapy may help replace those thoughts with steadier, safer interpretations.

4) Building confidence and coping responses

Instead of relying on forceful willpower during fear, hypnotherapy can help you rehearse coping—so that when the real moment arrives, you have a learned “new way to respond.”

5) Supporting gradual exposure (in a comfortable, paced way)

Some hypnotherapy plans include imagery or guided steps that prepare you for real-life situations gradually. This can reduce overwhelm and help your confidence build.

Important note: Phobias are often easier to treat when you choose a hypnotherapist experienced in anxiety/phobias and you continue any recommended coping strategies between sessions.

## Myths about phobias and hypnotherapy

Myth 1: “Phobias are irrational, so you should just stop being afraid.”

Phobias are not a choice or a lack of discipline. They involve automatic nervous-system responses. With the right support, healing is realistic.

Myth 2: “If I avoid it, the fear will get better.”

Avoidance can reduce fear short-term, but it often keeps the fear strong long-term because it teaches the brain that avoidance is necessary for safety.

Myth 3: “Hypnotherapy forces you to change without your control.”

Ethical hypnotherapy is collaborative. You remain aware and in control. If something doesn't feel right, you can guide the process or stop.

Myth 4: “Hypnosis means you'll go into a 'trance' and lose memory.”

Many people stay aware and can remember what happens. It varies from person to person.

Myth 5: “Hypnotherapy is instant—so one session cures everything.”

Some people notice shifts quickly, but phobias can take time to re-pattern. Healing often improves steadily across sessions and practice.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Can anyone develop a phobia?

Yes. Phobias can happen to anyone. People differ in temperament, sensitivity to anxiety, and past experiences—those differences can shape which fears develop.

Why do I feel fear even when I know it's not that dangerous?

Your fear system can be triggered automatically. Your mind may understand “safe,” but your body may have learned “danger,” and that learned response can fire quickly.

Is a phobia the same as anxiety?

Not exactly. Anxiety is broader and can be about many situations. A phobia is more specific: it's fear centered on a particular trigger.

Will I have to “face” the phobia right away?

Not necessarily. A good treatment plan usually goes at a pace that supports

confidence and reduces overwhelm. Some people start with relaxation and imagery first.

How many sessions does it take?

It varies based on the person, the phobia type, severity, and whether avoidance is strong. Many people start noticing improvement within the first few sessions, with continued gains afterward.

What if I feel embarrassed about my phobia?

You're not alone. Many people hide fears because they worry about judgment.

Phobias are common and treatable—your experience matters.

A gentle way to get started (practical encouragement)

If you're ready, you can begin by writing down:

- What you fear (the trigger)
- What you feel in your body • What you do to avoid or escape
- What you wish would be different

That gives your therapist a clear starting point and helps tailor the work to you.

If you want help getting started

If you'd like guidance on healing from your specific phobia, you can book a supportive consultation with Brendan Hypnotherapy Online. Together you can discuss what triggers the fear, what it's costing you, and what a realistic, supportive plan could look like for you.