



vita
health group

What is a Phobia?

Name:

Date:



What is a Phobia?

A phobia is a common type of **anxiety disorder**. It is an extreme form of fear or anxiety, triggered by a particular situation or object.

In the UK, an estimated **10 million people** have phobias. Phobias can affect anyone, regardless of their age, sex, and social background.

Here are some examples that you might find helpful

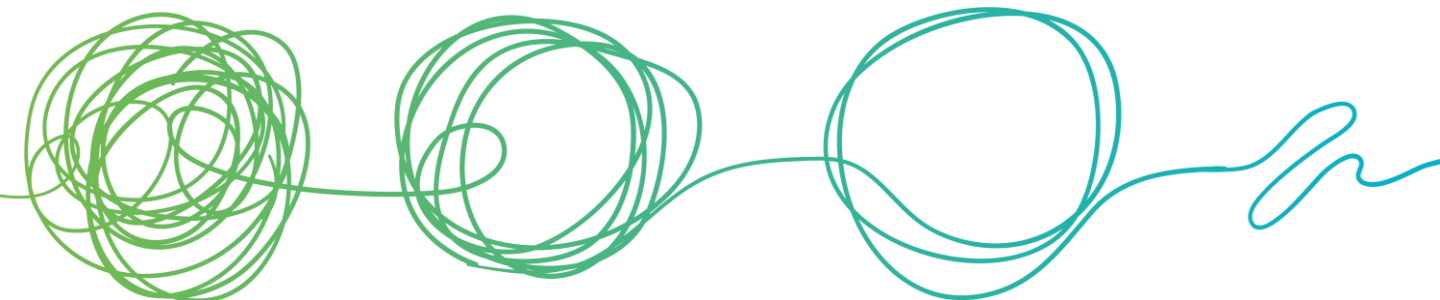
A situation that triggers a phobia

You may know it's safe to be out on a balcony in a high-rise block, but feel terrified to go out on it. You might not even be able to enjoy the view from behind the windows inside the building.

An object that triggers a phobia

You may know that a spider isn't poisonous or that it won't bite you, but this still doesn't reduce your anxiety.

You may even feel this extreme anxiety when you think or talk about the situation or object.



What is a Phobia?

Many of us have fears about particular situations or objects. This is perfectly normal.

The fear is out of proportion to the danger

It lasts for more than six months

A fear becomes a phobia if:

It has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life

It is understandable that we will want to avoid this particular situation or object. However, it is this **avoidance which keeps the phobia and fear going.**

Specific Phobias

These are phobias about a specific situation or object, such as spiders or flying. They often develop in childhood or adolescence. For some people, they might become less severe as they get older.

Some fairly common specific phobias are:



Animal phobias e.g. dogs, insects, snakes



Situational phobias e.g. flying, tunnels, small spaces, the dentist



Phobias of the natural environment e.g. heights, water, germs



Body-based phobias e.g. blood, injections, choking



Other phobias e.g. certain foods

However, **your phobia can be a completely unique experience.**

There are many more specific phobias than those listed above.

There doesn't seem to be one particular cause of phobias. There are various factors that might contribute to developing a phobia. But there is not often a clear reason why it starts.

Examples of what might cause a phobia:



Genetic factors

Research suggests that some people are more vulnerable to developing a phobia.



Learned responses from early life

For example, developing the same phobia as a parent or sibling. If they have a severe reaction to something they fear, this might influence you to feel the same way.



Long-term stress

Stress can cause feelings of anxiety and depression, which can reduce your ability to cope in particular situations. This might make you feel more fearful or anxious about being in those situations again. Over a long period, this could develop into a phobia.



Past incidents

Certain situations might have a lasting effect on how you feel about them e.g. if you were injured by a dog some years ago, you might develop a phobia of dogs.



Responses to panic or fear

You might experience anxiety or panic in response to a situation or object. You may find yourself feeling embarrassed by this, especially if people around you react strongly to your response. You could develop more intense anxiety about the idea of this happening again.



Phobias can feel different for everyone and symptoms can vary in severity.

Generally, the symptoms involve experiencing intense fear and anxiety. This occurs in the face of the situation or object you're afraid of. If your phobia is severe, even thinking about it can trigger symptoms.

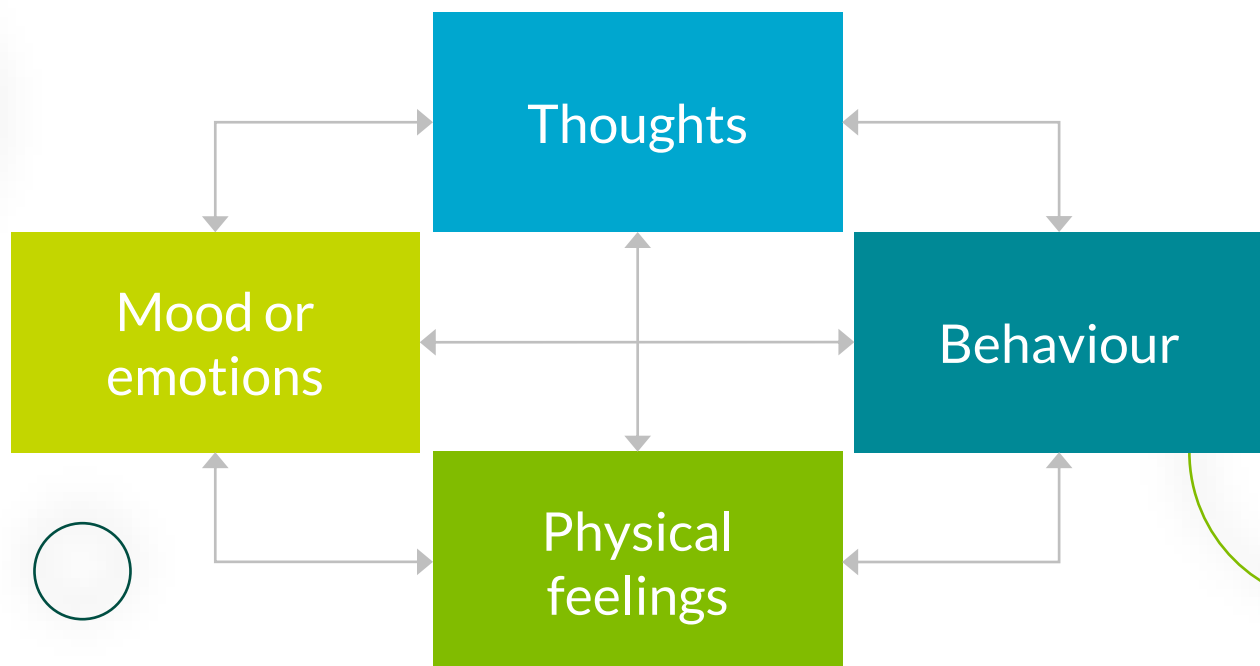
Put a tick next to the symptoms that you relate to or write down some of your own.

Common phobia symptoms





- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness, lightheaded or faint | <input type="checkbox"/> Trembling or shaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choking feeling | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear and anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart racing or palpitations | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain or tightness in chest | <input type="checkbox"/> Dissociation - feeling out of touch with reality or detached from your body |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> Panic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hot or cold flushes | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling loss of control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath or trouble breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling overwhelmed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea or vomiting | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling embarrassed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach problems or stomach pains | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Numbness or tingling sensations | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding the situation or object | |

Do you have any other symptoms you've noticed?

The Cognitive Behavioural Model (CBT)



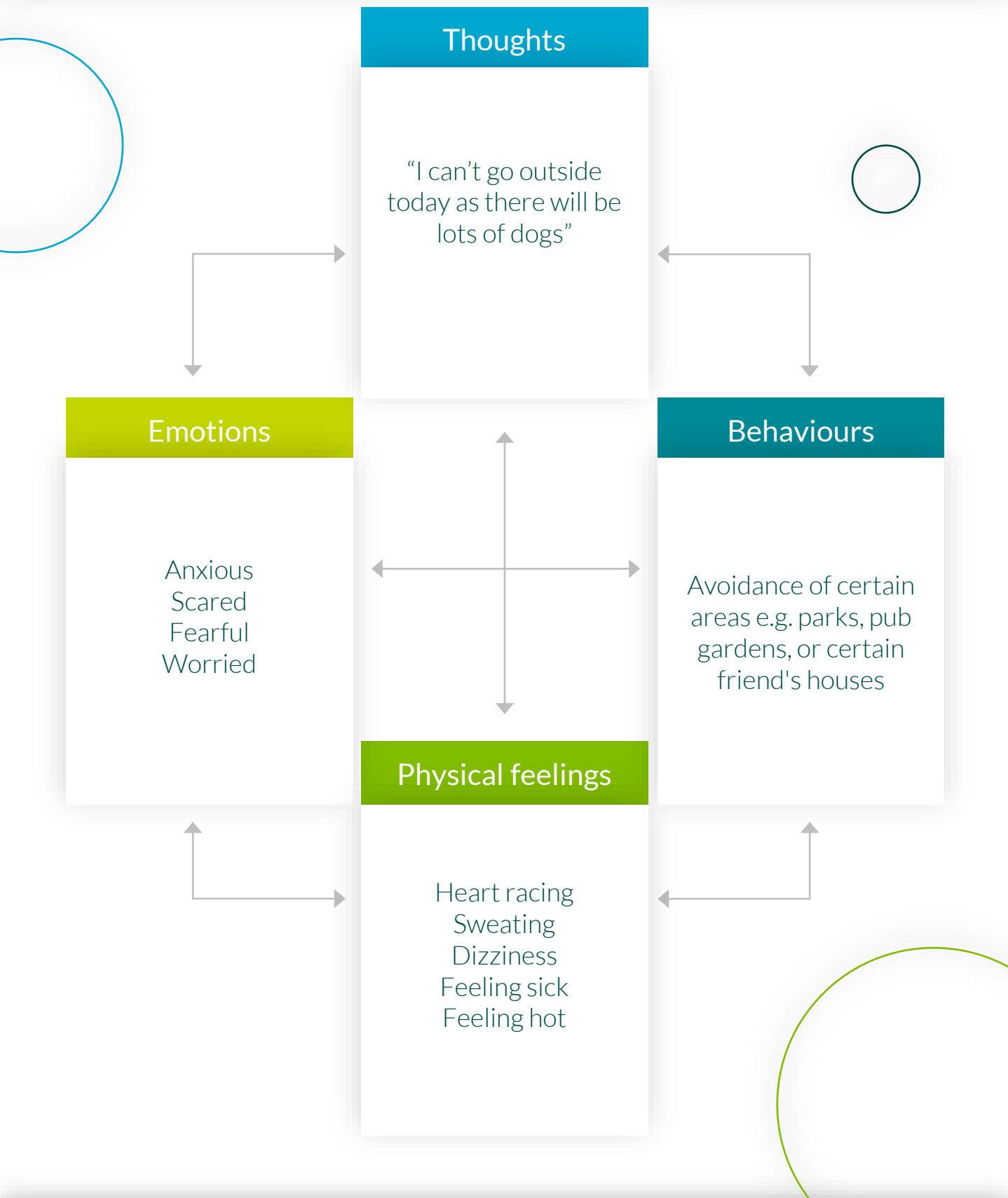
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) focuses on present maintenance cycles to understand our difficulties. CBT looks at what physical symptoms, behaviours, thoughts and emotions we experience, and how each of these areas impact each other:

-  **Thoughts** are often negative and exaggerated (e.g. worst case scenario, self critical)
-  **Behaviours** are our attempts to cope with a situation (e.g. avoidance)
-  **Physical sensations** are how our body reacts to our problem (e.g. tension, tiredness)
-  **Mood or emotions** are how we feel (e.g. low, angry, scared, or embarrassed)

When we understand this, we can see that by changing one of these to be more helpful or positive, the others will change too. CBT uses evidence-based techniques to help us make positive changes to break out of these cycles and improve our wellbeing.

Throughout your sessions, we will help to introduce specific tools and techniques which you can use to help manage your mood and anxiety. You will be expected to practise these techniques and review these each week. This will enable you to become your own therapist.

Vicious Cycle of Phobias



Your CBT Cycle

