



Specific Phobia



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What is Specific Phobia?

Specific phobia is a type of anxiety disorders which is characterized by excessive and irrational fear to a particular object or situation. In some cases, facing the object or situation can even bring on a panic attack. Commonly feared objects and situations include flying, heights, animals, receiving an injection, seeing blood, etc... In extreme cases, the fear response is not only cued by the real object or situation, but also at the mere mentioning or sight of visual representations of it, which in turn lead to avoidance behaviors.

How do I know if I have Specific Phobia?

Other than experiencing intense fear responses, individuals suffering from specific phobia will also experience palpitation, trembling, chest discomfort, and shortness of breath when confronting a feared object or situation. Most people recognize that their fear is excessive and unreasonable, yet are unable to control it. They will avoid the feared situation or object at all costs, which eventually limits one's daily life activities. For instance, a person with phobia of flying will avoid traveling by plane altogether, or avoid jobs that require working at height. Their fear can also disrupt social relationships.

What are the different types of Specific Phobia?

The different types of feared objects or situations include :

- *Animal Type*
Fear of animals and insects
- *Natural Environment Type*
Fear of natural phenomenon (e.g. storms, heights, water)

➤ *Blood-Injection-Injury Type*

Fear of seeing blood or wounds, having injection, and other medical procedures

➤ *Situational Type*

Fear of specific situations (e.g. crossing bridges, flying, driving a car)

How can I help myself manage Specific Phobia?

1. Actively seek treatment and participate in the process.
2. Make a commitment to face your difficulties courageously.
3. Do relaxation exercises regularly to relieve symptoms of anxiety.
4. Maintain a healthy lifestyle: eat a healthy and balanced diet, exercise regularly and moderately, cultivate meaningful hobbies, maintain social contacts.

What are the treatments for Specific Phobia?

1. Psychotherapy

Cognitive-behavioural therapy is an effective treatment for specific phobia. It is designed to help individuals modifying their irrational anxiety-provoking thoughts, and to confront the feared objects or situations in a gradual manner, with the aim of reducing one's anxiety and expanding one's comfort zone. Initially, individuals will feel uneasy when facing feared objects or situations in therapy, but with repeated exposure, anxiety will be reduced gradually.

2. Medication

For more complicated cases, or if the person with specific phobia also suffer from other mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, prescription medication may be indicated.