

## Phobias and Panic Attacks

This fact sheet will give some information about phobias and panic attacks and how to find help through local statutory agencies, in addition to national organizations.

### What are phobias?

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We all experience fear and anxiety in our daily lives, as a useful emotion to keep us alert and avoid danger. A phobia is a common form of anxiety expressed as an intense fear of a situation or an object, which becomes excessive or irrational. It then impacts on a person's life and inhibits their participation and enjoyment of daily activities. There are many different types of phobias, such as fear of spiders, birds, closed or open spaces, heights, or fear of social situations. Some specific phobias can be readily avoided such as fear of flying, while others, fear of going outside for example, have detrimental effects on work, shopping and relationships.

### Where do phobias come from?

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A phobia can often be linked to a significant event, and the fear lingers on long after the event, so for example a fear of going outdoors may be related to an earlier attack or mugging, and the realistic fear and anxiety have become generalised to all outdoor situations. In cases of long-term reaction to a serious threat or traumatic event this is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (NOTE: Link to Harrow Factsheet on that topic). Sometimes phobias arise as a secondary factor in someone's mental ill health. For example, some people with depression withdraw from friends and family. When the time comes to go shopping or socialising, it can be very frightening, so is avoided if at all possible.

### What can I do about it?

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Your GP can refer you to a local psychology service or other organisations which may be able to assist. However, often people with phobias develop their own coping strategies to deal with it, perhaps by avoidance, so it can be very difficult to change an avoidance behaviour possibly used for years. It therefore follows that it is much better to seek help early, before the adaptive restricting strategy becomes entrenched.

Different forms of psychological help can be very effective and work fast - cognitive behavioural therapy can remove a moderate phobia, such as fear of the Underground, within a few sessions. If you feel the phobia is linked to a severe traumatic event you may want to explore the origins of the fear in more depth through counselling.

## What are Panic Attacks?

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A panic attack occurs when you experience an extreme sense of fear, often abruptly, without warning. This is part of the body's normal defence 'fight or flight' system. You may tremble, become short of breath, feel palpitations, become dizzy or faint. You may feel you are having a heart attack or could stop breathing. You may not be able to link it to a known fear or concern, but it may be associated with a phobia, or other anxiety.

## What can I do about it?

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Like phobias, it will help to visit your GP if you experience these regularly. You may be referred to a psychologist to learn breathing and relaxation techniques or other cognitive behavioural techniques. Your first step is to recognise that you have the power to control your symptoms. You will then be able to utilise the techniques in the event of future panic attacks. Your GP may also prescribe medication. The organisations listed below could also help you with ways to control your symptoms.

## Local Statutory Services

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### Clinical Health Psychology Department

Mental Health Unit, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ. Tel: 020 8869 2326  
This service can assist with therapy to help you control your symptoms. Referral from GPs, psychiatrist, and Community Mental Health Team. There is a waiting list.

### Harrow Talking Therapies Service

Clinical Psychology Department, T Block, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 3UJ. Tel: 020 8515 5015 / 5016  
The Talking Therapies Service offers evidence-based therapies, which provide choice and early intervention to people affected by mild to moderate anxiety and depression

## National Organisations

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### Anxiety UK

Run by sufferers and ex-sufferers of anxiety disorders Services offered include: a telephone helpline, e-mail support service (via website) information

Zion CRC, 339 Stretford Road, Hulme, Manchester, M15 4ZY

Tel: 08444 775774 (Helpline) Monday – Friday 09:30-5:30pm

SMS: 07537 416905

Email: [info@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:info@anxietyuk.org.uk) or for support email [support@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:support@anxietyuk.org.uk)

Web: [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

### No Panic

Support and information, including a written recovery programme for phobias.

No Panic, Jubilee House, 74 High Street, Madeley, Telford, Shropshire, TF7 5AH

Tel: 0844 967 4848 (helpline, 10am-10pm), 01952 680 835 (24/7 recording of a calming breathing technique), 01753 840393 (youth helpline for 13 to 20 year olds, 4pm-6pm Mon-Fri)

Email: [admin@nopanic.org.uk](mailto:admin@nopanic.org.uk)

Web: [www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk)

### Triumph over Phobia

Network of self help groups run by trained volunteers

PO Box 3760, Bath, BA2 3WY

Tel: 01225 422 705

Email: [info@topuk.org](mailto:info@topuk.org)

web: [www.topuk.org](http://www.topuk.org)

**British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)**

Can provide details of accredited Imperial House, Hornby Street, Bury, Lancashire BL9 5BN

Tel: 0161 705 4304

Web: [www.babcp.org.uk](http://www.babcp.org.uk)

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

See website or send A5 SAE for details of local practitioners BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 4HB

Tel. 01455 883 300, Fax: 01455 550 243

Email: [bacp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk)

Web: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

## Websites

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**Royal College of Psychiatrists Leaflet**

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/anxiety,panicandphobias.aspx>

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