

Anxiety is an adaptive response, an individual with an anxiety disorder experiences anxiety that is disproportionate to threats that are presented.

4. Phobias are the most common form of anxiety disorders. Phobias are an extreme irrational fear of certain situations, objects, people or activities; the level of fear is so great the object or situation is avoided whenever possible. Phobias are known as an emotional response learned because of difficult life experiences. Generally phobias occur when fear produced by a threatening situation is transmitted to other similar situations, while the original fear is often repressed or forgotten. The excessive, unreasoning fear of water, for example, may be based on a childhood experience of almost drowning. Phobias are classified into three main categories; specific phobia, social phobia and agoraphobia. Specific phobias is the fear of a single specific panic trigger such as spiders, snakes, frogs ect. Many people have these fears but to a lesser degree than those who suffer from specific phobias. Social phobia involves the fear of other people or social situations such as performance anxiety or fears of embarrassment by scrutiny of others, such as eating in public. Agoraphobia is a generalized fear of leaving home or a small familiar 'safe' area. This may also be caused by various specific phobias such as a fear of open spaces or social embarrassment. Phobias vary in severity among individuals. Some individuals can simply avoid the subject of their fear and suffer relatively mild anxiety. Others suffer full-fledged panic attacks with all the associated disabling symptoms. Most individuals understand that they are suffering from an irrational fear, but they are powerless to override their initial panic reaction.

There are various treatments for phobias, both biological and psychological. Drug therapy is the most commonly used for short term periods. The use of anxiolytics (benzodiazepines) is quick and effective although drugs have their disadvantages such as side effects, the cost and the psychological and physical dependency of them. For longer -term periods psychological therapies such as behavioural therapy, cognitive -behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychotherapy are used. Behavioural therapy has two main methods aimed at specific phobias. The two main methods are systematic desensitisation and flooding, both of which are very effective. However, these methods only treat the symptoms and have raised some ethical issues concerning the flooding technique. CBT looks at pin-pointing your faulty thoughts and then dealing with them. This method is very empowering however the individual may become dependent of the therapist. Psychotherapy involves dream analysis and free association by bringing your unconscious thoughts conscious and dealing with them. This identifies both the causes and the symptoms however ethical issues rise as bringing the unconscious thoughts conscious may cause more distress to the patient than before.

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