Can Exposure Therapy Help You?

October 10 is National Face Your Fears Day, a day dedicated to helping people brave the fears that haunt them. In theory, this is a great idea, but facing your fears can often be easier said than done.

Fears and phobias are a form of anxiety that can be difficult to face for many people. Sometimes, exposure to the fear can be beneficial. And sometimes, not so much. So, just how effective can exposure therapy be in helping you face your fears?

# Defining Fears and Phobias

Fear can be defined as a person’s response to stressful situations. It occurs within one’s mind as well as in their physical body. Fear was developed as an evolutionary measure to ensure the human species’ survival.

When one is experiencing fear, they might experience what is known as the “fight, flight, or free” response. When feeling afraid, one will likely experience rapid breathing, an increased heart rate, heightened senses, muscle tension, and sweating.

More intense fears that focus on something specific can be considered “phobias,” an intense fear of a certain thing or situation. Those experiencing phobias may not experience fear or anxiety in other areas of their life but will feel afraid of their specific phobia.

## Common Fears and Phobias

Fears and phobias can come in many different shapes and forms. A few of the more common phobias and fears include:

* Claustrophobia- a fear of confined spaces
* Social phobia- a fear of social situations
* Acrophobia- a fear of heights
* Aerophobia- a fear of flying
* Cynophobia- a fear of dogs
* Mysophobia- a fear of germs and dirt

# What is Exposure Therapy

Exposure therapy is a form of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) that can help treat phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). It was developed to help people confront their fears and phobias.

When a person is experiencing a fear or phobia, they will generally avoid the object or situation at all costs. While this can appear to be a good short-term solution, it can make the fear even stronger in the long term.

Exposure therapy breaks that pattern of avoidance, allowing clients to face their fears and phobias in a controlled and safe setting. [Exposure therapy](https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/exposure-therapy) will be paced depending on the client’s needs. It can include different strategies, like:

* Interoceptive exposure, which involves bringing on physical sensations that are safe but feared
* In vivo exposure, which involves facing the fear in person
* Virtual reality exposure, which involves facing the fear with virtual reality technology
* Imaginal exposure, which involves one imagining their fears

# How Effective is Exposure Therapy?

Exposure therapy has been scientifically proven to be highly effective in the treatment of phobias, fears, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The treatment has become so trusted that it is considered an [empirically supported treatment](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4525733/) (EST).

# We Are Here for You

Sometimes, facing your fears can be more effective with the help of a mental health professional. If you are searching for a counselor to help you face the things keeping you up at night, we are here for you. [Contact](https://www.michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php) us today, and our caring and compassionate therapists will work with you to overcome the fear that is holding you back from living your best quality life.

**References**

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Keywords: anxiety, phobias, CBT, psychotherapy, counselor