

# Symptoms

## Phobias

- [Symptoms](#)
- [Causes](#)
- [Self-help](#)
- [Treatment](#)

A phobia is an irrational and overwhelming fear of an object, place, situation, feeling or animal.

Phobias develop when a person has an exaggerated or unrealistic sense of danger about a situation or object. If a phobia becomes very severe, a person may organise their life around avoiding the thing that causes them anxiety.

All phobias can limit your daily activities. They may cause severe anxiety and depression. Complex phobias, such as agoraphobia and social phobia, are more likely to cause these.

You may often avoid coming into contact with the thing that causes you fear and anxiety. For example, if you have a fear of spiders (arachnophobia) you may not want to touch a spider. You may not even want to look at a picture of one.

You do not have to be in the situation you fear to experience the symptoms of panic. The brain can create a reaction to fearsome situations, even when you are not actually in the situation.

## Symptoms

People who have phobias become anxious when confronted with the subject of their phobia. For some people even the thought of it can make them anxious. In some cases, people can experience a panic attack because of their phobia.

## Physical symptoms

The physical symptoms of anxiety and panic can include:

- sweating
- trembling
- hot flushes or chills
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

- a choking sensation
- rapid heartbeat (tachycardia)
- pain or tightness in the chest
- a sensation of butterflies in the stomach
- nausea
- headaches and dizziness
- feeling faint
- numbness or pins and needles
- dry mouth
- a need to go to the toilet
- ringing in your ears
- confusion or disorientation

## Psychological symptoms

In severe cases, you may also experience psychological symptoms, such as:

- fear of losing control
- fear of fainting
- feelings of dread
- fear of dying

## Types of phobias

There are 2 types of phobia:

- simple phobias
- complex phobias

### Simple phobias

A simple phobia is an irrational and intense fear of a specific object, animal, situation or activity. It commonly develops in childhood and usually becomes less severe with age.

### Complex phobias

A complex phobia is a more disruptive or disabling phobia. It can have a negative effect on your everyday life and wellbeing. Agoraphobia and social phobia are the 2 main types of complex phobias.

### Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia often involves a combination of several phobias. You may have a fear of going outside or leaving your home. You may also have a fear of being left alone (monophobia), or of places where you

feel trapped (claustrophobia).

The symptoms of agoraphobia can vary in severity. Some people can feel very apprehensive and anxious if they have to leave home to go to the shops. Others may feel okay about travelling short distances from their home.

Find out more about [agoraphobia](#)

## Social phobia

If you have a social phobia, thoughts of being seen in public or going to social events can make you feel:

- frightened
- anxious
- vulnerable

Avoiding meeting people in social situations is a sign of social phobia. Some people with social phobia and agoraphobia are too afraid to leave their home.

Find out more about [social phobia](#)

## Treating phobias

Both simple and complex phobias can be treated successfully. Treatment options include talking therapies and self-help techniques. In some cases medicine may be prescribed to treat the anxiety associated with a phobia.

It can often take some time to overcome a complex phobia.

[Treatment of phobias](#)

---

Content supplied by the [NHS](#) and adapted for Ireland by the HSE

Page last reviewed: 1 September 2022

Next review due: 1 September 2025

## HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](#)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](#)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive