

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

By: Chester E. Brost

PHOBIA! Entomophobia (fear of insects); pyrophobia (fear of fire); acrophobia (fear of heights); even gamophobia (fear of marriage). And, while the list is limitless, almost self-perpetuating as in the case of phobophobia (fear of being afraid), approximately 8 percent of American adults suffer from these irrational feelings of fear of a particular situation, experience, or object.

Though categorized as an anxiety disorder, people who suffer from phobias often do not experience the same elaborate, ritualistic, and sometimes even painful behavior of someone suffer from, say, an eating disorder, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, which, too, are anxiety disorders. Phobias, such as social phobia, where speaking to a stranger can cause panic and a sense of dread, vary largely in degree. Some phobias are so mild that they could hardly be considered a disorder. And, accordingly, people who have mild phobias rarely seek treatment. On the other hand, there are documented cases of people with agoraphobia (fear of open spaces, or going out in public) who have not left their dwelling place for more than a decade.

THE PHOBIC BRAIN. Obviously, phobias originate from within the brain. More specifically, fear originates in the almond shaped brain structure called the amygdala (a-mig-dug-luh). If you'll recall my article entitled INSTINCTS: Motorcycle Safety and the Caveman Brain (Free Riders Press-October, 2004) the amygdala supplies emotions, like fear and anger, at lightning speed. And, while the amygdala plays two very converse roles: one as the responsible human preparing the body to defend against possible injury, and the other as the running rabbit (fight or flight), the sea-horse shaped brain structure called the hippocampus (hip-eh-kam-

pes) plays its role by storing memories of the outcome or possible outcome of the object, situation, or experience that the amygdala has been conditioned to respond to. In some cases even the memory or thought of the phobia in question will stress the phobic and activate the amygdala.

These cavemanesque

fear responses are so primitive and deeply ingrained into our brains, that only after they occur does the prefrontal cortex get involved-the conscious part of the brain that helps one reach a more balanced judgement. However, with those who suffer from these anxiety disorder, by the time that the prefrontal cortex gets involved, it's usually to late. When the cortex comprehends what is happening, the amygdala and hippocampus have already taken control, deeming ones fears much more potent than our intellectual analysis.

THE UNPHOBIC BRAIN. Behavioral therapy and therapy by exposure, combined with medication, have been used to reduce fears and eliminate phobia successfully. However, medications may cause phobias themselves. Some fear that the meds will change their personalities, or even become stuck in their throats.

The challenge of therapy is to introduce patients to their fears over and over again until they learn how to control the wave of panic, gradually changing the amygdala and hippocampus, through the efforts of the prefrontal cortex, causing these structures to unlearn their fears.

Scientist Michael Davis at Emory University, during his work with rats (lab rats, not snitches), found proteins in the amygdala that may speed up the process of unlearning these fears. This protein, combined with another drug, helped to eliminate fears and phobia.

If you are one of the millions of Americans that suffer from phobias, contact one of the following sources of help. This is just FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH.

Ride Safe,
Chuck

Freedom from Fear
(888) 442-2022
www.freedomfromfear.org

Anxiety and Phobia Treatment Center
(914) 681-1038
www.phobia-anxiety.org

Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA)
(240) 485-1001
www.adaa.org

Ross Center for Anxiety
(202) 363-1010
www.rosscenter.com

Virtually Better (Virtual-reality Therapy) (440) 634-3400
www.virtuallybetter.com
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animals
bees
birds
blood
bridges
burial alive
cats
children
choking
cold
confined spaces
crowds
dark
death or corpses
depths
dogs
drunkenness
foreigners
ghosts
heights

zoophobia
apiophobia
ornithophobia
hemophobia
gephyrophobia
taphophobia
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pedophobia
pnigophobia
cyrophobia
claustrophobia
ochlophobia
scotophobia
necrophobia
bathophobia
cynophobia
dipsophobia
xenophobia
phasmophobia
acrophobia

Fear of:
illness
injury
insects
lightning
madness
old age
pain
poisoning
pregnancy
sleep
snakes
public speaking
surgery
stepmother
thirteen
thunder
trains
travel
water
women

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