

## HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE?

Many people who experience anxiety disorders like panic disorder or phobias can feel ashamed about their experiences. They may blame themselves or see their experiences as a problem with their personality rather than an illness. It's important to recognize the courage it takes to talk about difficult problems.

Supporting a loved one in distress can be difficult, especially if you don't fear the object or situation yourself. You may also be affected by a loved one's anxiety. For example, some people seek constant reassurance from family and friends, or demand that they follow certain rules. These behaviours can lead to stress and conflict in relationships. But with the right tools and supports, people can manage anxiety well and go back to their usual activities. Here are some tips for supporting a loved one:

- Remember that thoughts and behaviours related to anxiety disorders are not personality traits.
- A loved one's fears may seem unrealistic to you, but they are very real for your loved one. Instead of focusing on the thing or situation itself, it may be more helpful to focus on the anxious feelings that they cause. It may also help to think of times you have felt intense fear to empathize with how your loved one is feeling.
- People naturally want to protect a loved one, but 'helping' anxious behaviours (like taking care of everyday tasks that a loved one avoids) may make it harder for your loved one to practice new skills.
- If a loved one's behaviours are affecting you or your family, it's a good idea to seek family counselling. Counsellors can help with tools that support healthy relationships.
- Be patient—it takes time to learn and practice new skills. Take time to congratulate a loved one when you see them using skills or taking steps forward.
- Set your own boundaries, and seek support for yourself if you need it. Support groups for loved ones can be a good place to connect with others and learn more.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.**

# PHOBIAS AND PANIC DISORDER



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Everyone feels scared at times. But sometimes, fear can come up in a situation that isn't expected. This fear stops us from going about our usual routines or working towards our goals. Phobias and panic disorder are two examples of mental illnesses that can lead to these problems.

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## WHAT ARE PHOBIAS?

A phobia is an intense fear of a specific thing like an object, animal, or situation. Two common phobias include heights and dogs.

We all feel scared of certain things at times in our lives, but phobias are different. People change the way they live in order to avoid the feared object or situation. For example, many people feel nervous about flying, but they will still go on a plane if they need to. Someone who experiences a phobia around flying may not even go to an airport. Phobias can affect relationships, school, work or career opportunities, and daily activities.

## WHAT IS PANIC DISORDER?

Panic disorder involves repeated and unexpected panic attacks. A panic attack is a feeling of intense fear or terror that lasts for a short period of time. It involves physical sensations like a racing heart, shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, shaking, sweating or nausea. Some people feel like they're having a heart attack or suffocating, or fear that they are dying. However, a panic attack goes away on its own.

Panic attacks can be a normal reaction to a stressful situation or a part of another mental illness. With panic disorder, panic attacks seem to happen for no reason. People who experience panic disorder fear more panic attacks and may worry that something bad will happen as a result of the panic attack. They may avoid places, sensations, or activities that remind them of a panic attack.

Some people avoid any situation where they can't escape or find help. They may avoid public places or even avoid leaving their home. This is called agoraphobia.

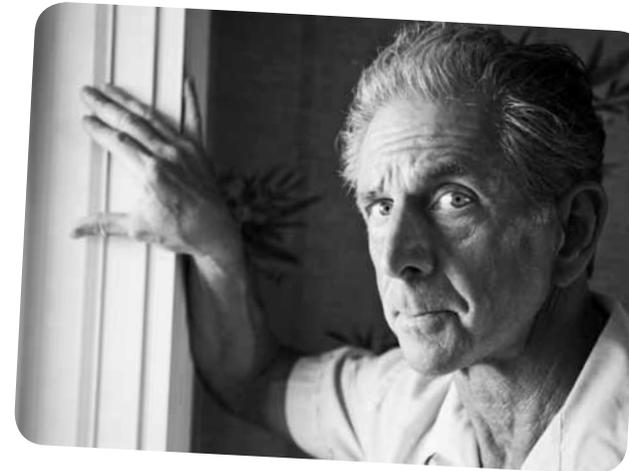
## WHO DO THEY AFFECT?

Anyone can experience panic disorder or a phobia. No one knows exactly what causes phobias or panic disorder, but they are likely caused by a combination of life experiences, family history, and experiences of other physical or mental health problems.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Most people who experience problems with anxiety recognize that their fears are irrational but don't think they can do anything to control them. The good news is that anxiety disorders are treatable. Recovery isn't about eliminating anxiety. It's about managing anxiety so you can live a fulfilling life.

Some physical health problems, such as heart or thyroid problems, can cause anxiety symptoms. Your doctor will look at all possible options to make sure that another medical problem isn't behind your experiences.



## Counselling and support

Counselling can be very helpful in managing anxiety, and it's often the first treatment to try if you experience mild or moderate problems. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (or 'CBT') is shown to be effective for many anxiety problems. CBT teaches you how thoughts, feelings and behaviours all work together. Counselling for panic disorder and phobias, in particular, may also include exposure. Exposure slowly introduces feared things or situations.

Support groups may be a good way to share your experiences, learn from others, and connect with people who understand what you're experiencing.

There are many self-help strategies to try at home. Small steps like eating well, exercising regularly, and practicing healthy sleep habits can really help. You can practice many CBT skills, like problem-solving and challenging anxious thoughts, on your own. Ask your support team about community organizations, websites, or books that teach CBT skills. And it's always important to spend time on activities you enjoy and connect with loved ones.

## Medication

Antianxiety medication may help for short-term difficulties or situations, but it usually isn't the best option for long-term use. Some types of antidepressants can help with anxiety, and they can be used for longer periods of time. It's important to remember that medications can't change all of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that drive anxiety, so counselling is usually recommended. Some people take medication until their anxiety is controlled enough to start counselling.