Phobias in one page

What it is

What is a phobia?

A phobia is a fear of one thing or situation that is much bigger than the real danger, does not fade, and changes what you do. Most people with one know the fear does not match the risk and still cannot talk themselves out of it. It is a recognised anxiety condition, and it responds well to treatment.

- Fear far bigger than the actual danger
- It changes what you do, not just feel
- Knowing it is unreasonable does not stop it

The signs

What are the symptoms of a phobia?

A phobia brings fast, strong fear whenever you meet one thing or situation, or even think about it. Your heart races, you sweat or shake, and you want to get away. You avoid it, and the fear does not match the real danger.

- The fear comes almost every time you meet the trigger
- Avoiding the trigger is a core sign
- The fear is bigger than the real danger

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for a phobia?

In Australia, phobia help starts with your GP, not a specialist. Ask for a Mental Health Treatment Plan: it does not require a formal phobia diagnosis, only proof the fear is limiting your life. The plan lets you claim a Medicare rebate for up to 10 individual psychology sessions a year, where exposure therapy is the treatment that works.

- Start with your GP, before any psychologist
- No formal phobia diagnosis required
- Ten Medicare-rebated sessions a year

Treatment

What is exposure therapy?

Exposure therapy means deliberately and gradually facing the thing you fear, instead of avoiding it, until your anxiety drops on its own. The most effective form is in vivo exposure, done with the real object or situation rather than just imagining it. A therapist guides you through it step by step, starting small.

- Facing the fear shrinks it over time
- Facing the real thing works better
- Therapy builds up in small stages

Medication

Can my GP give me something to calm a flight or a scan?

Yes, a GP can prescribe a calming medicine, but no medicine we found is approved for a specific phobia. The one general anxiety medicine our sources set out is prescription only, listed on the PBS and needs no special permit. Most states make the prescriber check a monitoring system first. For a flight, carry the box, your script and a doctor's letter.

- No medicine is approved for specific phobia
- A GP can prescribe; no special permit needed

What it costs

What does a psychologist cost?

There is no single price. Under Medicare's Better Access scheme, a GP mental health treatment plan gets you up to 10 individual psychology sessions a year with a rebate toward the fee, but the psychologist sets their own price, so the amount you pay out of pocket, the gap, varies between practices.

- No single fixed price for treatment
- Medicare rebate covers part, not all

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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