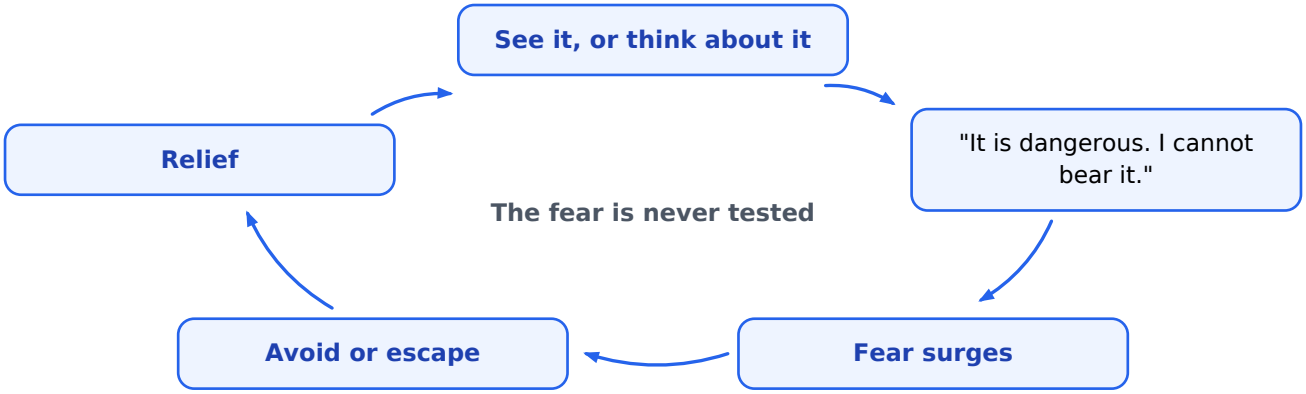
Understanding phobias

A strong fear of one particular thing, out of proportion to the danger.

A phobia is an intense fear of a specific object or situation: heights, flying, dogs, spiders, needles, vomiting, lifts, the dentist. You may know the fear is bigger than the real risk and still feel unable to face it.

How a phobia develops

Sometimes there was a frightening experience. Sometimes the fear was picked up from someone else, or there is no clear starting point at all. How it began matters less than what keeps it going.



How phobias are treated

Phobias respond very well to graded exposure. You build a ladder of steps, from looking at a picture to the real thing, and work up it at a pace you choose. Many people improve a lot within a few sessions.

Along the way you test what you believe would happen. "The dog will bite me." "The lift will get stuck and I will run out of air." "I will lose control." These predictions almost never come true, and the fear reduces as you find that out.

> **Blood, injury and needle fears are different**
> Most fears raise blood pressure. With blood and needles, it can rise and then drop sharply, which is why some people faint. A technique called applied tension (tensing the big muscles of the arms, legs and body for 10 to 15 seconds, then releasing, and repeating) keeps blood pressure up. Ask me to teach you this before starting exposure, and check with your GP if you have a heart condition.

What does my phobia stop me doing, and what would I do if it were gone?

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