- Phobias

# BREAK FREE FROM PHOBIAS

In the fifth instalment of his series about mental wellbeing, Chris Meaden looks at how to take back control from phobias.

WE ALL HAVE things that make us uncomfortable, whether it's spiders, heights or public speaking, but for some, fear goes beyond a simple dislike and becomes something life-limiting. Phobias are extreme, irrational fears that trigger an intense fight-or-flight response, even when there is no real danger. They can interfere with everyday life, causing avoidance behaviours, panic attacks and even physical symptoms such as dizziness, nausea and a racing heart.

Phobias can develop at any stage in life, often because of past experiences or subconscious associations that the brain has linked with danger. But you don't have to live with fear forever. Phobias are treatable and, with the right approach, you can retrain your brain to respond differently.

No matter the phobia, the underlying mechanism is the same: the brain has mistakenly learned to associate something harmless with extreme danger.

But a phobia is not just about disliking something; it's about experiencing an overwhelming fear response that feels completely out of your control. When faced with (or even thinking about) the object of the phobia, sufferers may experience:

- Panic attacks – including racing heart, sweating, dizziness, and difficulty breathing.
- Avoidance behaviours – going out of your way to avoid places, people, or activities linked to the phobia.
- Intrusive thoughts – obsessing over possible exposure to the phobia.
- Loss of control – feeling powerless against the fear, even when logically, you know it's irrational.

Avoidance may bring temporary relief, but it strengthens the phobia over time. The key to breaking free is retraining your mind to recognise that the feared object or situation is not a real threat. The first step is recognising that your fear response is not a reflection of reality: it's simply a learned pattern. And just as the brain has learned to fear something, it can also learn to feel safe again.

Be assured that it is possible to fly without panic, eat freely without fear of getting sick, or step into social situations without crippling anxiety when you teach your brain a new, healthier way to respond.

## 4 WAYS TO BEAT PHOBIAS

Phobias are deeply wired into the subconscious mind, which is why simply telling yourself to "get over it" doesn't work. Instead, real change comes from working with the brain and nervous system rather than against it. The Meaden Method combines all of the below into a unique, fast-acting approach that helps people break free from phobias and reclaim their confidence in just a few hours.

**1. HAVENING** This is when you stroke down the sides of both arms, simultaneously, as if comforting yourself. Doing so generates delta brain waves, calming your amygdala and reducing the emotional charge of fearful memories.

**2. CLINICAL HYPNOSIS** This bypasses your conscious mind and helps to reframe automatic reactions, replacing fear with a sense of calm and control. It can be particularly effective for people whose phobias have been present for many years.

**3. THOUGHT FIELD THERAPY** This is a fast, effective method that involves tapping on specific acupressure points while focusing on the fear. This technique helps reduce the fight-or-flight response, making the fear less intense.

**4. PSYCH-K** This helps to rewire subconscious beliefs such as "I am not safe" or "I can't handle this". PSYCH-K helps rewrite limiting beliefs at a subconscious level, allowing your brain to form new, more empowering responses.

WORDS: CHRIS MEADEN. IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.



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## SOME OF THE MOST COMMON PHOBIAS

- Emetophobia (fear of vomiting) – can lead to extreme avoidance of certain foods, public places, or even pregnancy due to morning sickness anxiety.
- Health-related phobias – such as fear of illness (nosophobia) or medical procedures such as needles (trypanophobia), which can prevent people from seeking medical care.
- Social phobia – a deep fear of being judged or embarrassed in social situations, which can lead to avoiding parties, work meetings, or even speaking on the phone.
- Agoraphobia – fear of being in situations where escape feels difficult, often leading to avoidance of busy places, public transport, or even leaving home.
- Claustrophobia – fear of enclosed spaces, which can make lifts, planes, or MRI scans unbearable.
- Flying phobia – can limit travel and impact career or family life.
- Animal-related phobias such as arachnophobia (fear of spiders) and cynophobia (fear of dogs).



**Chris Meaden is a leading trauma and anxiety expert who runs The Meaden Clinic, specialising in treating anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD, trauma, and phobias with rapid techniques that address the root cause rather than just the symptoms. Visit chrismeaden.com.**

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