Fears and phobias are a natural and common part of life for many people, if not all. A fear becomes a phobia when the fear is intense, irrational, and at times debilitating. Phobic symptoms include shortness of breath, loss of reality, a flight response, nausea, panic attacks and more. A reaction to a phobia can be a very scary thing, and if the phobia is persistent enough, can also be a hindrance on living a normal life. If a phobia begins to interfere with normal functioning in your day-to-day life, it may be time to seek help and get phobia treatment.

You should seek help for your phobia if there is an object or situation that causes intense fear, anxiety or panic. You should also seek help if the phobia causes you to avoid certain everyday situations or objects, such as leaving the house or dealing with a pet. Another indicator that you should seek help for a phobia is if you can recognize that your fear is irrational and excessive. If it is apparent to you that the phobia is unreasonable, chances are that it is also apparent to many other people in your life. Lastly, you should seek help for a phobia if you have had the phobia for more than six months because this is an indicator that the phobia will most likely not go away on its own.

Treatments for phobias usually fall within the cognitive-behavioral therapy field. Trained and licensed therapists normally use exposure therapy, or systematic desensitization, to cure people of phobias. This involves exposing the patient to the feared object or situation in gradual stages. Using this method, about 75% of people who suffer from phobias are able to overcome the phobia. Exposure therapy for phobias may take several weeks or months to conquer a phobia because the exposures are done in small steps. The exposures are also combined with relaxation technique and verbal therapy to deal with the other components of a phobia. Once the root issue of a phobia is addressed and the therapist can begin to retrain the mind not to be scared of an object or situation, the phobia will begin to dissolve.

While specific phobias are often treated with behavioral therapy, this method doesn’t always work, and doesn’t always work best for some forms of phobias. Specific phobias are the easiest to treat with exposure therapy, but other methods do exist for treating phobias. Social phobia and agoraphobia often require medications as well as behavioral therapy to cure the phobia.

Different types of medications can be prescribed by a doctor to treat phobias. One type of medication is a beta-blocker. Beta-blockers are best for people who suffer from phobic symptoms that involve panic attacks or severe anxiety because they block the effects of adrenaline on the body. The effects of adrenaline are what cause the pounding heart, increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure. Beta-blockers help people who suffer from phobic symptoms retain their composure. Another form of medication for people who suffer from phobias is antidepressants. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are often used to treat phobias. This form of medication influences the mood by acting on the chemical serotonin. Examples of SSRIs are Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac, and Celexa. If these medication cause restlessness or any other side effect, doctors may prescribe monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) instead.

In very rare cases, sedatives can be used as a form of treatment for phobias. Sedatives should
only be reserved for the most severe cases because they can be habit forming and lead to dependence. Sedatives help regulate the anxiety of stressful situations and help people suffering from phobias feel more stable in any situation. Benzodiazepines like Valium, Xanax, Librium and Ativan are all medications that have been used to treat phobias.