



Social Phobia

Social phobia is an intense fear of social situations where the sufferer feels that he or she will act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing.

Social Phobia often runs in families and may be (co-morbid) accompanied by depression or alcoholism. Social phobia often begins around early adolescence or even younger. If you suffer from social phobia, you tend to think that other people are competent in public and that you are not. Small mistakes you make may seem to you much more exaggerated than they really are. The nature of a person with social phobia means that they will be hypersensitive and find criticism where it is not intended.

The act of blushing itself may seem painfully embarrassing, and the sufferer can feel as though all eyes are focused on them. They may be afraid of being with other people other than those closest to them. Or their fear may be more specific, such as feeling anxious about giving a speech, talking to a teacher or other authority figure, or general fear of social situations such as parties. More rarely it may involve other people, for instance when signing a cheque.

Although this condition is often thought of as shyness, the two are not the same. Shy people can be very uneasy around others, but they don't experience the extreme anxiety in anticipating a social situation, and they don't necessarily avoid circumstances that make them feel self-conscious. In contrast, people with social phobia aren't necessarily shy at all. They can be completely at ease with people most of the time, but particular situations, such as walking down an aisle in public or making a speech can give them intense anxiety. Social phobia disrupts normal life, interfering with career or social relationships. The dread of a social event can begin weeks in advance, and symptoms can be quite debilitating.

People with social phobia are aware that their feelings are irrational. Still, they experience a great deal of dread before facing the feared situation, and they may go out of their way to avoid it. Even if they manage to confront what they fear, they usually feel very anxious beforehand and are intensely uncomfortable throughout. Afterwards, the unpleasant feelings may linger, as they worry about how they may have been judged or what others may have thought or observed about them.

Treatment

About 80 percent of people who suffer from social phobia find relief from their symptoms when treated with cognitive-behavioural therapy, medications or a combination of the two. Therapy may involve learning to view social events differently; being exposed to a seemingly threatening social situation in such a way that it becomes easier to face; and learning anxiety-reducing techniques, social skills, and relaxation techniques.

The medications that have proven effective include antidepressants called MAO inhibitors. Drugs called beta-blockers have helped people with a specific form of social phobia called performance phobia. For example, musicians or others with this anxiety may be prescribed a beta-blocker for use on the day of a performance.