

## Exposure Therapy and CBT for Anxiety Disorders Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Exposure Therapy?

A: Exposure Therapy is an evidence-based psychological treatment for anxiety disorders. It involves slowly confronting the objects or situations that provoke your anxiety. As you begin to face your fears, your anxiety will naturally decrease during the “exposure”. After multiple exposures, the object or situation will evoke less and less anxiety each time, and patients then usually move up to more difficult or anxiety-producing objects or situations.

Q: What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

A: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (or CBT) is an evidence-based psychological treatment for anxiety disorders. CBT incorporates Exposure Therapy (see above) but also uses a variety of techniques and skills to help patient identify and challenge their excessive or irrational beliefs about the likelihood or seriousness of dangers posed by the feared situations or objects.

Q: Can Exposure Therapy be harmful?

A: Very unlikely. The anxiety experienced during exposure is not harmful to patients, nor will it put you at risk for “going crazy” or having a “mental breakdown”. With a skilled CBT or Exposure therapist, the situations or objects confronted during exposures are no more dangerous than what other people experience on a daily basis.

Q: How long should I expect to need CBT or Exposure Therapy?

A: Of course, everyone is unique and some people may require shorter or longer periods of treatment to overcome their anxiety disorder. Typically, treatments consisting of 8 to 16 weekly one-hour sessions have been shown to be successful in clinical trials for most patients.

Q: Will my fears return after finishing CBT or Exposure Therapy?

A: Not usually. According to clinical trials of Exposure Therapy and CBT for anxiety disorders, most people either maintain their gains or continue to improve after finishing treatment. Your therapist will likely discuss strategies you can use after finishing therapy to help you make sure you don’t have any relapses. When relapses do occur, you and your therapist can typically schedule more sessions to help get your anxiety back under control.

Q: How effective is CBT or Exposure Therapy? What are its “success rates”?

A: CBT and Exposure Therapy are considered the most effective treatments for anxiety disorders. Most national guidelines and treatment recommendation guidelines consider Exposure Therapy and CBT to be first-line treatments of choice. Success rates for treatments of mental illnesses are difficult to gauge because of different definitions of “success,” however most estimates range from 60% to 90% of treatment completers either no remaining symptoms or “sub-clinical symptoms” (meaning if the anxiety were this mild in the first place, the individual probably would not have needed treatment).

Q: Are CBT and Exposure Therapy helpful for children with anxiety?

A: Yes. Although the treatments are modified so that children can better understand them, Exposure Therapy and CBT are almost identical for children and adults.