



Phobia development  
c/o www.epsychvce.com

Defined: a persistent, intense and irrational fear  
of a specific object or situation

Biological cause

GABA Dsyfunciton

GABA is the major inhibitory neurotransmitter in  
the Central NS

GABA has an inhibitory influence of the fight-  
flight-freeze response

A dysfunctional GABA system can result in an  
excessive physical response to a (phobic  
stimulus) and thus PREDISPOSE an individual  
to the development of a phobia.

Role of the stress response

If the stress response is sustained or  
continually activated, high levels is stress  
hormones can linger in the bloodstream and  
can can have a detrimental effects if it is s  
triggered by a perceived threat - I.e. a phobic  
stimulus.

LTP

The more the phobic stimulus is revisited (or  
thought of) the more the neural (fear) pathway  
in the brain is strengthened.  
This occurs via the amygdala in terms of the  
intensity of the fear and the hippocampus  
which is responsible for the consolidation of the  
memory.

Psychological causes

Behavioural model

According to the behavioural model phobias  
result from interruptions with the environment

Classical conditioning

A neutral stimulus can be conditioning into a  
conditioned stimulus (the phobic stimulus) as a  
result of a environmental event

The conditioned response is the fear response  
triggered by the presence of the phobic  
stimulus (CS)

Phobias are typically PRECIPITATED via  
classical conditioning

Operant conditioning

Phobias are typically PERPETUATED by  
operant conditioning

A phobia may be sustained via negative  
reinforcement through avoidance which  
strengthens the phobia by avoiding the aversive  
phobic stimulus

Cognitive model

According to the cognitive model, phobias  
develop from the thought processes that  
influence our feelings & behaviour; resulting in a  
COGNITIVE BIAS - such as...

Memory bias

Catostrophic thinking

Attentional thinking

Social factors

Specific environmental triggers

Parental modelling

Transmission of threat

Stigma around seeking treatment