

A Phobia Sampler

By Catherine Austen www.catherineausten.com/phobias.htm

***Agrizoophobia* : Fear of wild animals**



Lions and tiger and bears! The fear of wild animals (and other things that can kill you) is normal and sensible, but phobics take it too far. *Agrizoophobics* would not take precautionary measures before camping or hiking. They wouldn't go camping or hiking at all. They wouldn't let their children go. They wouldn't even watch a movie about it. *White Fang* and *The Incredible Journey* are beyond their tolerance.

Teddy bears are used in therapy to treat people with *Agrizoophobia*. The fear of Teddy bears, *Arctophobia*, is apparently less common than the fear of real bears.

***Ailurophobia*: Fear of cats**

Over 100,000,000 cats sleep on couches, beds, and window sills across North America. Many people feel strongly for these felines. Most love them. Some hate them. A few are absolutely terrified of them.

Ailurophobics will not visit cat-owning friends. They will not pass a cat on the sidewalk. They may even refuse to leave their own feline-free houses. Unlike the *Cynophobic*, who fear that dogs are dangerous, the *Ailurophobic* often fear that cats are intrinsically evil. They are truly mentally ill, no?

Napoleon Bonaparte was *Ailurophobic* (but he didn't have a problem leaving his house to go conquering).



***Apiphobia*: Fear of bees**



Apiphobia may begin with the pain and surprise of a real bee sting. Fed by misinformation, a natural wariness can grow into an irrational fear of being stung again. Sufferers need to learn that honeybees are our friends. They sting only in defense of their hive. It's the yellow jacket wasps that attack repeatedly for no good reason.

Apiphobics and those suffering other forms of *Entomophobia*, the fear of insects, will avoid picnics and hikes. Some stay indoors even in the nicest weather. These people are clearly suffering from a mental illness (except for those afraid of Junebugs, who wisely head inside at 7:00 p.m. and double-check their screens).

***Aquaphobia*: Fear of water**



Like many fears, *Aquaphobia* is often linked to a bad childhood experience, such as falling into water, being told frightening stories about drowned relatives, or discovering that under a sparkling blue surface is the black unknown we crawled out of hundreds of millions of years ago, and it's rife with primitive life forms that leech and sting and pull you down into darkness.

Aquaphobia is a self-defeating fear, as sufferers are reluctant to learn to swim, and their panic will cause them to drown if they end up in deep water—so stay on dry land already.

The term *Hydrophobia* is more often used to refer to a fear of water caused by a physical illness such as rabies.

***Arachnophobia*: Fear of spiders**

Thanks to the 1990 horror-comedy of this name, *Arachnophobia* is one of the best-known mental illnesses in America. It is also one of the most common.

Few spiders are poisonous enough to harm a human. But all are fanged predators that catch their prey and suck it dry. Giant spiders scuttle through centuries of stories because we see what they do to their captives, and we can't help imagining the horror.

As Charlotte told Wilbur, spiders are essential in controlling insect populations. (Also, though Charlotte didn't mention it, if you squish a spider you'll make it rain.) So leave them be. Get therapy.



***Chronomentrophobia*: Fear of clocks**



This unusual phobia is not to be confused with *Chronophobia*, the fear of time (which is much too hard to get your head around), or *Gerontophobia*, the fear of aging (which is much too easy to get your head around).

Chronomentrophobics suffer acute distress in the presence of a clock. Seriously. Even just the sound of a clock chiming or ticking is cause to flee.

The digital revolution may have benefited *Chronomentrophobics*, as numbers are less frightening than clock-faces with hands going round and round eternally.

***Dendrophobia:* Fear of trees**



Dendrophobics experience nausea, trembling and heart palpitations at the sight of trees. Not only will they avoid walks in the woods, they will refuse to travel to Palm Springs or Pine Valley.

Those who suffer from *Dendrophobia* rarely seek help, or even tell friends or family, because they fear being ridiculed. (I wonder why.)

Were *Dendrophobics* afflicted in infancy by nightly renditions of Rock-a-bye Baby? Were they menaced in early childhood by the orchard scene from *The Wizard of Oz*? Are there monsters hiding behind the trees? Who knows? But judging by modern housing developments, this mental illness is spreading far and wide.

***Equinophobia:* Fear of horses**

Many people are daunted by a horse's strength, speed, and unpredictability. Some are terrified by the animal's size and power, its twitching flanks, snapping teeth, and evil glowing eyes. (All right, that last bit was from a horror comic.) Donkeys (pictured at right) are much nicer.

Equinophobia often grows from a bad experience in second-rate tourist attractions: young riders get bucked, thrown and dragged down a path, while petting farm visitors get bitten, bumped and snorted at. Face it: horses are dangerous. They throw people to their deaths. The beautiful beasts are best admired from a distance.



The fear of horses is also known as *Hippophobia*, and it's even scarier when you call it by that name.

***Iatrophobia:* Fear of doctors**



Most of us feel anxious about the results of blood tests and biopsies, but *Iatrophobics* are too scared to set foot in a doctor's office. Some suffer for years with perfectly treatable conditions just to avoid the terror of the white coats.

Doctors bear bad news. They poke in private places. And until the modern age of painkillers, they caused incredible pain. But they also cure us, making *Iatrophobia* a mental illness with serious physical consequences.

Iatrophobia is difficult to treat, as sufferers are unlikely to seek medical help for their illness.

***Mysophobia*: Fear of dirt and germs**



Mysophobics may wash their hands repeatedly, wear gloves, and refuse to eat food prepared by others. As their illness worsens, they become unable to touch objects ever touched by others. Eventually they may live housebound in well-bleached rooms.

Those who suffer only from a fear of visible dirt can lead more normal lives, with just a few modifications. In June 2008, the BBC carried a story of a *Mysophobic* piglet that needed Wellington boots to step into the mud with her siblings. *Ablutophobia*, the fear of taking a bath, is at the opposite extreme to *Mysophobia*.

Eccentric millionaire Howard Hughes was the world's most famous *Mysophobic*. (Actress Joan Crawford also suffered from this illness, but she's better known as a bad mom.)

***Obesophobia*: Fear of gaining weight**

In times past, when calories were scarce and fat was a sign of wealth, *Obesophobia* was rarely experienced.

This modern mental illness leads to eating disorders such as *anorexia nervosa* or *bulimia*. Its treatment requires medical help and a strong personal support system. (Cancelling subscriptions to fashion magazines is advised.)

Obesophobia is one of the few phobias that can actually kill its sufferers, whose fear may lead them to starve themselves to death.



***Ophidiophobia*: Fear of snakes**



Like *Arachnophobia*, the fear of spiders, and *Apiphobia*, the fear of bees, *Ophidiophobia* is a rational fear gone mad. Years of fame as Satan's familiar and the cause of man's fall have not helped the snake's PR. (Slithering and hissing haven't done much good either.)

A few snakes *are* deadly poisonous. And *all* snakes will bite if you try to pick them up. But that's no reason to stutter and shake at the sight of these awesome reptiles. (Unless you're a mouse, in which case a slow and agonizing death awaits if you don't flee in terror.)

Therapy helps. (Yes, that means eventually handling snakes. Try it. You won't like it, but it'll help.)

***Pediophobia*: Fear of children**



The joys of feeding and diapering are not for *Pediophobics*. If asked to watch Junior for just a moment, these sufferers are overwhelmed by anxiety. While fear of being inadequate to the task may be involved, the phobia is mostly a horror of the wild, unpredictable, loud and messy nature of children themselves.

Pediophobics fear babies and young children; the age at which a child no longer terrifies varies from phobic to phobic. *Ephhebiphobia*, the fear of teenagers, is a different illness.

Pediophobia is also the name for the fear of dolls, especially creepy ones with chipped paint and blood-red smiles and eyes that track your every step.

***Sciurophobia*: Fear of squirrels**

While some of us are charmed by these little cuties, others can't get past the orange teeth and fleas. If you suffer from *Sciurophobia*, your skin crawls and you just want to die when a squirrel scabbles down a tree with a "chhkk—chhkk—mwa-ha-hah."

All rodent-phobia sufferers experience an overwhelming horror in the presence of the animal and, often, a wish to eradicate the poor little critters. This is unlike the rational fear of contaminated food and corresponding wish to keep the rodents outdoors.

Sciurophobia is rare compared to *Murophobia*, the fear of mice or rats (also called *Musophobia*). That is because mice and rats are creepier than squirrels.



***Scotophobia*: Fear of darkness**

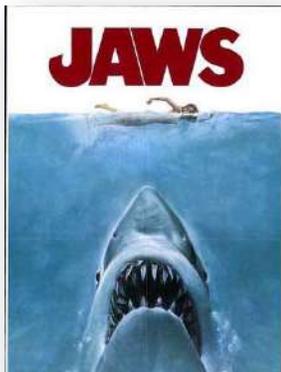


Raised in the age of the electric bulb, we modern folk have little inkling of just how scary the darkness is. *Scotophobics* know. When night falls, anything could be there—ANYTHING—just inches away in the dark, savouring the moment before it gets you.

In times past, darkness was hard to avoid come sundown, and *Scotophobics* had many a sweaty sleepless night. These days, nightlights and flashlights help sufferers stay sane. *Scotophobia* can be cured with gentle desensitization therapy.

Obsessive fear of darkness is also known as *Nyctophobia*, *Achluophobia*, and *Lygophobia*.

***Selachophobia*: Fear of sharks**



Few of us want to meet a shark, but *Selachophobics* avoid the ocean to make sure they never do. They won't even walk on the beach (because you never know).

The term *Galeophobia* also means “fear of sharks,” but more often refers to the fear of cats, weasels, or skunks. The shark-type of *Galeophobia* is the most difficult to treat. Fear of weasels can be cured by therapy in which the animal moves closer to the patient each session. That doesn't work so well with a Great White Shark.

Many instances of *Selachophobia* were triggered by the 1975 horror movie, *Jaws*. Honestly. Some people never got over it.

***Siderodromophobia*: Fear of trains**

All *Siderodromophobics* fear railway trains. Some fear the possibility of derailments, while others fear the swaying motion of the train. Still others fear the scream of scraping metal, or the knowledge that their lives rest in the hands of total strangers. Some sufferers not only fear being on a train, they fear being anywhere near a railroad track.

Claustrophobics, those who fear being confined in small spaces, often suffer from *Siderodromophobia*, too (and *Aviophobia*, the fear of airplanes).

Strangely, many *Siderodromophobics* who suffer terrible anxiety at the thought of traditional passenger trains can take the subway without breaking a sweat.



***Swinophobia*: Fear of pigs**



Pigs are smart and loving creatures that humans love to eat, and that's probably why *Swinophobia* was practically unheard of through most of human history. Whether because of their natures or their flesh, pigs are hard to hate.

The term *Swinophobia* came into fashion with the recent H1N1 pandemic alert. The term is now used more to mean “fear of swine flu” than “fear of swine.” Drastic measures taken in fear of the flu, such as mass killings on pig farms, are called *Swinophobic*. (Given the conditions on most modern pig farms, they ought to be called “euthanasia.”)