

# Ageing Mind Initiative

Issue 13, June 2012 Newsletter

[www.uq.edu.au/ami](http://www.uq.edu.au/ami)

## Inside this issue

This special edition of the AMI Newsletter will be exploring the fascinating world of anxiety and phobias

What is a specific phobia?

Specific Phobia is an anxiety disorder characterised by persistent and excessive fear of a particular object/situation, such as a fear of heights, spiders, snakes, dogs, flying and so on. People who suffer from a phobia feel intensely anxious when they are confronted with their feared object or situation. They can experience physical symptoms such as increased breathing and heart rate, dry mouth, sweating, shaking hands, dizziness, nausea and other sensations, which can sometimes lead to a panic attack. A panic attack is a period of intense fear or discomfort, where one experiences a number of distressing symptoms that develop rapidly and reach a peak in about 10 minutes. Some of these symptoms may be increased heart rate, sweating, trembling or shaking, shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, chills or hot flushes, fear of losing control or going crazy, among others.

Also, people who have a specific phobia often have a strong desire to avoid their feared objects/situation, even though they recognise that their fear is unreasonable or irrational. But what makes phobias different from other fears? The primary difference between a fear and a phobia is that the person's avoidance of the feared object, and/or distress when confronted with this object, has a significant impact on their everyday functioning.

Can phobias be treated?

Yes, phobias can be treated! Research indicates that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), involving an exposure-based intervention, is an effective treatment of specific phobias. CBT involves rethinking one's thoughts about the feared object or situation, and their avoidance of that stimulus. It involves relaxation strategies such as muscle relaxation and diaphragmatic breathing, in order to minimise anxiety. It includes cognitive therapy, which aims to change one's thoughts and beliefs about the feared object/situation. Finally, the treatment involves exposure therapy, where one is gradually exposed to the feared object/situation, in order to minimise anxiety and overcome avoidance of the object or situation.

Often people are hesitant to seek treatment for their phobia. They feel they can just live with it, even if it causes them discomfort, embarrassment or interferes with what they want to achieve in their life. But phobias can be treated successfully, and the treatments outlined above have good success rates.



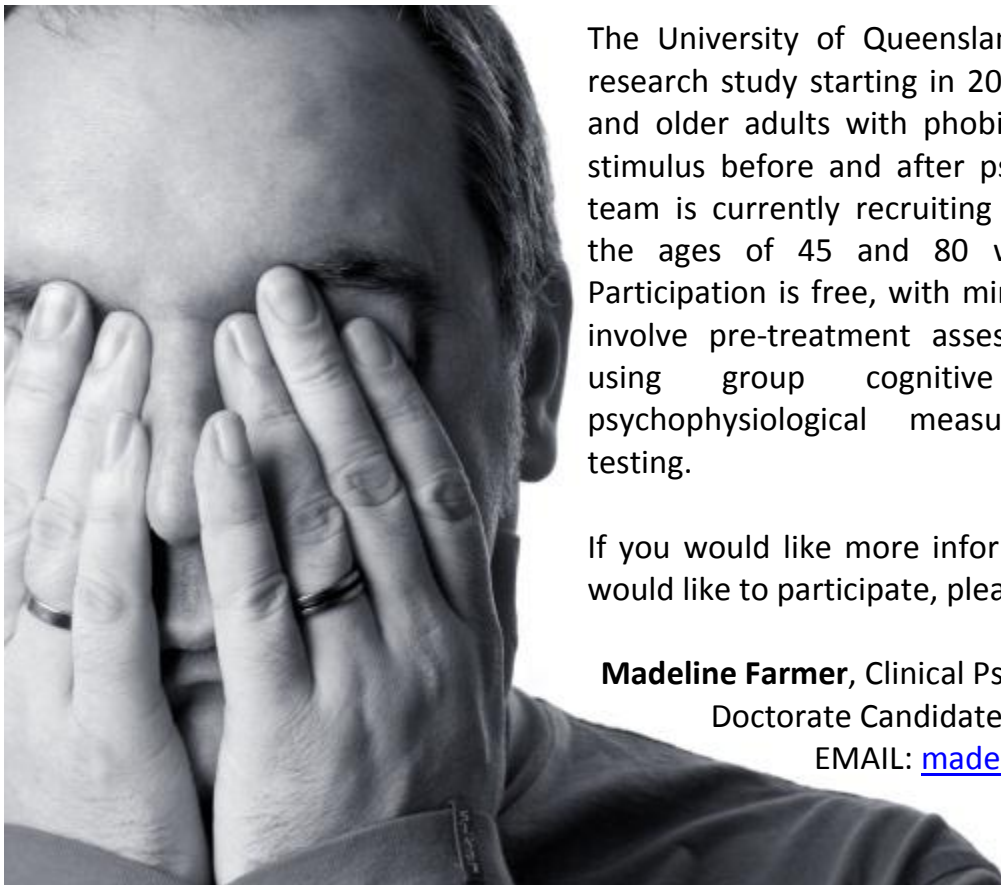
## ISSUE QUOTE:

Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained ~ Arthur Somers Roche

*SNAKES, SPIDERS, LIZARDS, MOTHS, DOGS, COCKRAOCHES  
Are these things that make you anxious?*

*Is there something else that you are afraid of? You may have a phobia.  
Do you want to overcome your fear?*

A phobia is a marked and persistent fear of an object, situation or event, which is excessive and unreasonable, and which interferes with one's everyday life. Phobias are more common than is often thought, with phobias being one of the most common anxiety disorders experienced by older adults. But the good news is, phobias have been shown to be effectively treated with psychotherapy.



The University of Queensland is currently conducting a research study starting in 2012 investigating how adults and older adults with phobias respond to their feared stimulus before and after psychotherapy. The research team is currently recruiting men and women between the ages of 45 and 80 who may have a phobia. Participation is free, with minimal waiting time, and will involve pre-treatment assessments, phobia treatment using group cognitive behavioural therapy, psychophysiological measurements, and follow-up testing.

If you would like more information about this study, or would like to participate, please contact:

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