

Haringey
LONDON

AGORAPHOBIA

with Mark Francis

Wikipedia

- **Agoraphobia** is an [anxiety disorder](#) characterized by symptoms of [anxiety](#) in situations where the person perceives their environment to be unsafe with no easy way to escape. These situations can include open spaces, public transit, shopping centres, or simply being outside their home. Being in these situations may result in a [panic attack](#). The symptoms occur nearly every time the situation is encountered and last for more than six months. Those affected will go to great lengths to avoid these situations. In severe cases people may become completely unable to leave their homes.
- Agoraphobia is believed to be due to a combination of [genetic](#) and environmental factors.^[1] The condition often runs in families, and stressful or traumatic events such as the death of a parent or being attacked may be a trigger. In the [DSM-5](#) agoraphobia is classified as a [phobia](#) along with [specific phobias](#) and [social phobia](#). Other conditions that can produce similar symptoms include [separation anxiety](#), [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), and [major depressive disorder](#). Those affected are at higher risk of [depression](#) and [substance use disorder](#).
- Agoraphobia affects about 1.7% of adults. Women are affected about twice as often as men. The condition often begins in early adulthood and becomes less common in old age. It is rare in children. The term "agoraphobia" is from [Greek](#) ἀγορά, *agorá*, meaning a "[place of assembly](#)" or "[market-place](#)" and -φοβία, *-phobía*, meaning "fear."

“FEAR OF THE MARKET PLACE”

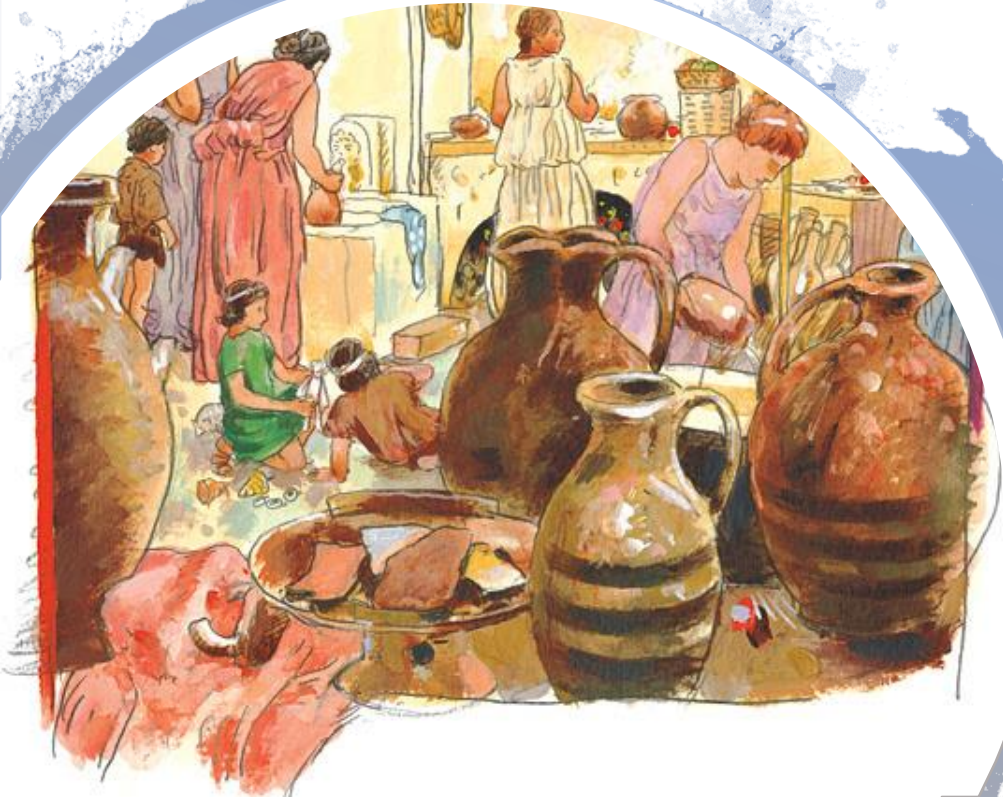
- **AGORA – Greek for Market Place & Phobia; “Fear.”**
- **NOT “Agrophobia” – which would be from “Ager”; Latin for field.**
- **What’s the difference?**

If you stare into the Abyss
long enough the Abyss
stares back at you.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Agoraphobia

- A field implies emptiness but a market place implies other people.
- People with agoraphobia are fearful of meeting other people outside, rarely the expanse of some kind of void.
- More than that, they are usually afraid of having an anxiety or panic attack.



COVID19 & Mental Health

- It has become commonplace to speak of the mental health damage inflicted by the Lockdowns in 2020.
- The implication has been that people cannot take being “locked in” or isolated from other people by prohibition on meeting others and loneliness & depression – is this your experience?
- Another experience from people who had been experiencing mental suffering beforehand is perhaps the opposite.

Out of the Lockdown...

- **Many people have sought isolation and stayed at home and the challenge faced is that of coming out again.**
- **What are you afraid of ?**
- **This is a genuine question. Examine and name what it is that you fear.**



WELL WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?

- **A Panic attack in public!**
- **Maybe you would be detained under the Mental Health Act?**
- **Maybe- have a heart attack?**
- **People will laugh? Or think you strange?**
- **What else?**

THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN !

- **1. Mental Health Act.**

- The police *might* take you to A&E (but they probably won't). Once the panic attack has passed (which it will within a few minutes) you will be let go – hopefully with some words of support & comfort.

- **2. Heart Attack.**

A panic attack can cause your heart to race (tachycardia). This will only give you a heart attack if you have a pre existing condition. Do you?

- **3. People will laugh or think you strange.**

Everyday in London you pass by hundreds of people. Statistically 20% are likely to be mentally ill. Out of the rest, there are no doubt a full range of good, bad, outright weirdoes or whom you are possibly the least. What is most likely is ..

- **4. PANIC !**



Actually its not
that bad



What is a Panic attack?

- A “panic attack” is a manifestation of anxiety – or “an Anxiety Attack”
- It is not an illness – it is a symptom which is characterised by swift & shallow breathing or hyperventilation & can be controlled.



There are any number of Google replies on how to cope with a panic attack.

- The one that always works for me is the 7.7.7. Breath control. It is better if someone helps you through it.
- Count Seven seconds - breathe in.
- Count Seven seconds – Hold it.
- Count Seven seconds breathe out.
- Why 7?

This is recommended by the NHS, but it does not have to be exact .

If you find the process embarrassing then you might want to tell bystanders you are asthmatic if you want. However it depends how you see stigma. I wouldn't.

Do **not** run & seek some safety – like run home. This is the wrong direction if you are going to overcome your problems (obvs.).

Brown Paper Bags

- This is no longer recommended for asthma attacks (although I have seen it done by an ambulance crew some years back).
- However breathing into a brown paper bag will help to re-circulate Carbon dioxide which helps to stop breathlessness.
- This **technique** is helpful during an **anxiety attack** and **panic attack** because it can help regulate hyperventilation.

How to do it

1. Hold a small **paper bag** (the kind used for lunches) over your mouth and nose.
2. Take 6 to 12 normal breaths.
3. Remove the **bag** from your mouth and nose.
4. Take a few breaths.
5. Repeat as needed.

SO HOW DO I GET OUT?

- **Often a nurse or similar will come round & take you out in “baby steas” at first for short distances, but gradually longer & longer.**
- **However it does not have to be a health professional, but maybe a friend, relative or neighbour.**
- **Or if possible – do it yourself.**
- **Set targets each day. To the corner. To the third lamp post – to the shop. Have a purpose. You can write out a “Treatment Plan”**
- **When you have finished – treat yourself. (doesn’t have to be too many cakes)**
- **Or better yet – to the Clarendon Recovery College. Say I sent you.**

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- People often find buses & tubes challenging. This is mostly because agoraphobia can manifest in small spaces as well, but chiefly because one is often forced to stare opposite strangers for up to an hour at a time.
- With the Coronavirus Pandemic this has brought further fears & dangers. I generally avoid people who do not (for whatever reason) are not wearing masks.
- In your journey out of the house & agoraphobia (& the Pandemic) you may want to leave this step until after you have overcome the supermarket run.

LINKS

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/agoraphobia/treatment/>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/agoraphobia/symptoms-causes/syc-20355987>
- <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/personal-stories/how-i-achieved-my-cure-panic-disorder-and-agoraphobia>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/agoraphobia>