Claustrophobia

Claustrophobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by irrational fears of enclosed or small spaces. Claustrophobia arises from the fear of entrapment, confinement, suffocation and lack of control. The unreasonable fear is associated with unfamiliar surroundings or situations. This involves both emotional and physical reactions to triggered situations.

Specific phobias are the most common—involving things such as the dentist, driving, water, snakes, balloons or heights. It is usually not the object itself that the fear is derived from, it is the dire outcome that may result if put in that specific setting. The cause of phobias is not normally from a traumatic experience.

**Symptoms**

- Sweating, rapid heart beat, shortness of breath or hyperventilation, trembling, light-headedness or fainting, nausea, feelings of dread, terror or panic and avoiding situations that previously brought on those symptoms.

**Treatment**

This can be overcome with systematic desensitization—by placing them in the setting that provokes the anxiety. CBT—Cognitive-behavioral therapy—learning to control the thoughts that occur when confronted with the fear-inducing situation in such a way as to change the reaction.

**Causes**

There may not be an obvious cause but results from a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. Anxiety disorders run in families and claustrophobia also appears to be related to certain brain functions (Lower levels of GABA are associated with higher levels of anxiety).

**MRI and Phobias**

- Studies have shown that placing patients in the “prone” position (face down) when performing an MRI in high-field unit, alleviates symptoms of claustrophobia and anxiety.
- Studies have shown that claustrophobic or anxiety varies by the area of the body being imaged—head and spine are associated with greater distress than the knee.
- Other factors include the length of the procedure, gender, apprehension about the diagnosis, noise produced by the machine, as well as the size (length and width of tube) of the equipment.
- 5-10% of patients undergoing an MRI, experience severe claustrophobia or panic attacks and 30% experience milder distress due to the necessity to lie in a very confined space for a long time. 5% of claustrophobic patients fail to complete the exam.

**STATISTICS**

- Generalized anxiety disorders affects about 3% of the people in the general population in any given year. 55-66% of those are female.
- According to the American Psychiatric Association, 8% of American adults suffer from a phobia.
- Less than 5% of Americans actually suffer from claustrophobia.
Links

http://www.adaa.org
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
http://www.healthminds.org
American Psychiatric Association
http://www.nami.org
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
http://www.nimh.nih.gov
National Institute of Mental Health