

Star **weekender**

Scratching Post

Fear not reunions

Class reunions are often portrayed as traumatic. But in real life, that's not necessarily the case.



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Food

What a Shook-er!



The night of murder, mystery and mayhem was undeniably thrilling, but nothing

could beat the magic the kitchen staff served up.

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Paw Print

Snowflake's story

Some cats are just born lucky.

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FREE MOVIE TICKETS

Each week, the best **What a Holiday!** letter gets two complimentary movie passes, courtesy of Buena Vista Columbia Tristar Films. Please send letters to weekend@thestar.com.my with contact and personal details.

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The button will jump up and choke me. The toilet will suck me in if I turn my back when I flush it. The swimming pool monster will get me if I swim in the middle...

Ah, phobias. Many of us have one or two — some mild, some severe; some understandable, others just plain absurd. But to those of us who have them, the phobias are very real.

So what is a phobia? A phobia is an intense, persistent and irrational fear of certain situations, activities, things, people or creatures. It is not your run-of-the-mill fear. Being afraid of something does not necessarily mean you have a phobia. Just because you are afraid to take an examination or walk past a fierce dog across the street, for example, does not mean you have a phobia.

A phobia is different because it is an extremely strong fear that the person realises is irrational but cannot help harbouring. Take me, for example. I KNOW that there is NO such thing as monsters in a swimming pool but I dread swimming in the middle. I will only swim at the sides, even if the pool is not an even shape. Sounds silly?

Yes, but I can't help it. My lawyer friend, Puteri Shehnaz Majid, is terrified of butterflies and moths. "Not to say I don't like them... I fear them," she says. "I have panic attacks where I feel like I'm going to die. I stop breathing, my airway closes up, I get red spots... it's freaky."

The thing is, Shehnaz knows perfectly well that the objects of her fear are pretty, harmless creatures. She just can't help it. It's just the way she reacts to them.

The lead character in the TV show *Monk* is a good example of someone with an extreme case of phobia — he has a bagful of them, including a fear of heights, crowds, germs, clouds, milk, spiders, mushrooms, dentist, the dark, needles, feet, puppets, naked people, untidiness, disorder, unevenness, ladybirds, being locked in and being locked out.

The character claims to be afraid of 312 things! Even though he is a brilliant detective, I wouldn't want to be him. I was looking through the list of phobias the other day, and came across this one: Hipopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia. No, it's not a fear of monstrous hippos but rather a fear of long words. Now whoever said doctors don't have a sense of humour?

Phobia is a fear that doesn't go away. Someone who has a phobia will be frightened each and every time by the source of his phobia, and not just once or twice. It is not a phobia if, for example, you are afraid to bungee-jump but after you've done it, you feel like trying again.

People suffering from phobias often go out of their way to avoid their phobia trigger. Often, serious phobias have a significant impact on the person's quality of life. Symptoms typically include shortness of breath, rapid breathing, irregular heartbeat, overall feelings of dread, excessive sweating,

It's all in the mind

There are many things that can trigger a panic attack and paralyse one with fear. We take a look at some irrational phobias that afflict people.



nausea, dry mouth, feeling sick, shaking, heart palpitations, inability to speak or think clearly, and a fear of dying.

According to Sheila Menon, principal of London College of Clinical Hypnosis (LCCH) Asia-Australia, the original catalyst may have

been a real-life scare of some sort, or one acquired through other distant sources such as movies or witnessing someone experiencing trauma. It can also be "inherited" from a role model such as a parent, close relative or even celebrity.

Fear of press-stud buttons
Lai Yoke Foon, 82, ex-teacher

"I have been afraid of press-stud buttons since I was young. I get the jitters looking at them and can't touch these shiny buttons. I don't know why I can't stand them. I don't know the cause of the phobia — I just hate them.

"All my children have to ensure that any clothes they buy for me do not have these buttons. If someone who is not aware of my phobia gives such a blouse to me, I will have my children remove and replace the buttons. All my clothes which originally had these buttons have had them replaced.

"It's irrational, but I still have this fear until now."

Fear of huge blooming flowers and sprouting tubers
Nurfadilla Karim, 21, student (right)

"I am afraid of blooming flowers, especially those with huge petals. Pictures of huge flowers, huge flower-shaped accessories, like brooches and pins or bed sheets with huge flower prints

Phobic people



have the same effect on me. "I'm alright with buds, so rose buds are the only flowers my boyfriend will give me. I don't like plants with huge leaves either (*keladi*) or

anything that grows out of water, like the lotus. "I'm also afraid of sprouting tubers like onions and potatoes. I'm fine if there's nothing growing on them.

"I think I have been afraid of blooming flowers since I was a kid because my eldest brother told me stories about huge blooming flowers that ate people just to scare the heck out of me. I was five years old then.

"I walked several metres away from the huge sunflowers at the Singapore National Library car park so that I didn't have to be near them. I once came across a shopping mall that had huge sunflowers arranged on both sides of the staircase, and that definitely made me take another route down.

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