



# *Fear in the Face of Whiskers*

## *Lets talk about the real issue*

### *of*

# CYNOPHOBIA

Tzar Peter the Great panicked at the sight of insects, the Roman Emperor Augustus hid underground from lightening . Marcel Proust spent his last three years hidden away as he was terrified of open spaces, Hitler, Mussolini, Napoleon and Julius Caesar were scared of cats.

Phobias sometimes seem far fetched, even comical, but while ridiculous to dog lovers, the fear of dogs is a real medical condition that can make life unbearable. Cynophobia comes from the Greek words that mean “dog” (cyno) and “fear” (phobia). A person who has cynophobia experiences a fear of dogs that’s both irrational and persistent. It’s more than just feeling uncomfortable with barking or being around dogs. Instead, this fear may interfere with daily life and trigger a number of symptoms, like trouble breathing or dizziness.

Historical accounts indicate that cynophobia has been around for millennia. Genghis Khan’s fears ran so deep that he ordered all the dogs in the villages he conquered to be brought out and destroyed.



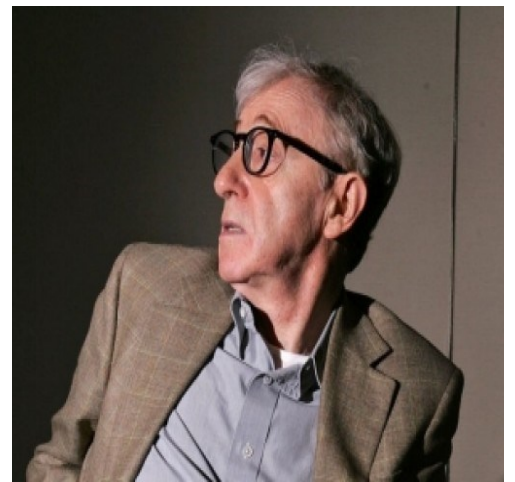
Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) loathed cats and dogs so much that he declared them the living work of the Devil in a papal decree.

The term Cynophobia has been used since the early 20th century. The concept of a phobia was introduced into medical science in 1871, agoraphobia, a fear of open spaces was the first phobia to be identified.



Many well known figures such as Rafael Nadal and Woody Allen both suffer with Cynophobia.

Woody Allen has probably more phobias than anyone alive. However Nadal also fears thunder, spiders, darkness, helicopters and motorcycles .





## Why are people afraid of dogs?



There are no definite answers to this question, nor a specific moment or period of life when it begins. Fear and the experience of it is extremely subjective. There is not a single cause; cynophobia may arise due to a combination of circumstances, and its severity may depend on how early it starts. Dog phobia in children can take root as early as age 5 or as late as age 13. It can last into adulthood if untreated, but is not limited to children or teens. Fear of dogs in adults has taken hold of people as old as 20 years of age, and persisted well into middle age. Fear may be due to a bad experience, it may be observational, if a close friend has been attacked in some way. Fear can even be a learned response brought on by reading an article or watching disturbing footage involving dogs.

Learned cynophobia can also be fostered by common misconceptions about breeds like the Pit Bull and Rottweiler. When entire cities introduce breed-specific legislation, they reaffirm urban legends that some dog breeds are naturally more vicious than others. This negativity creates an atmosphere in which fear of dogs becomes socially acceptable and legally sanctioned.

### Symptoms of cynophobia

People who are afraid of dogs may experience any of the following symptoms: Sweating, racing pulse, anxiety, desire to run away, dry mouth, dizziness, increased heart rate, nausea, panic, faintness, shortness of breath etc. Removal of the dog sees these symptoms subside. These are all classic symptoms of a panic attack. Though this is incomprehensible to dog lovers, there are many people whose lives can be severely restricted by their fear of encountering a dog.

### So how can it be treated?



More celebrities with cynophobia include the late Alfred Hitchcock who feared dogs, insects and eggs. Michael Jackson sought help for his cynophobia.



**In most places it is not possible to go through life without encountering a dog.  
So Ask yourself:**

- Do I excessively anticipate situations in which I'm going to be around dogs?
- Do I immediately feel fear or have a panic attack while I'm around dogs or think about being around dogs?
- Do I recognize that my fear of dogs is severe and irrational?
- Do I avoid situations in which I may encounter dogs?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may have a phobia. Your doctor can help. One of the most used approaches is graded exposure therapy. Patients are gradually exposed to dogs using pictures, videos and learn to temper and combat their fears. Cognitive behaviour therapy CBT is another approach and anti anxiety medication, even mild sedatives can be prescribed. Be assured there is help available.



My sister (Jill Barker) and I saw this therapy in action when we went to see Cesar Millan live in the Nottingham Arena some years ago. Having paid for VIP tickets we were treated to an additional hour of questions and interaction. The group fell very quiet when a gentleman rose to his feet and said he had only come because he was terrified of dogs and his children so wanted a puppy. His fears were irrational and making his home life a misery. Cesar Milan had several dogs with him on the stage and he quietly asked the gentleman to come up and join him on the stage. He was clearly terrified, white and trembling. The audience thought he would not be able to do it but Cesar promised that no harm would come to him and he would be by his side throughout.

He found the courage, first standing behind Cesar as Cesar quietly talked to the dogs. Then he was invited to stand alongside Cesar and then with hearts in mouth, Cesar asked him to stand in front of him, so he was facing the dogs.

With quiet, gentleness and support he helped the man face his fears. Then he sat on a chair while one of the dogs sniffed his hand, followed by a gentle lick of the fingers. After 20 minutes Cesar asked him to sit on the stage floor with the dogs to be at their level.

It ended with the man in tears as he was simply no longer afraid after so many years. He had a golden future to look forward to with doggy companions and his children would have the puppy they so wanted. Family and friends are everything in helping people with these fears. Reach out if you know someone who needs help.

**Mary Angell**