

# The historical roots of exposure therapy

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**E**xposure has been indicated as a common principle of most behavioral approaches to the treatment of anxiety and anxiety related disorders. In the main technique of exposure therapy, the patient is asked to expose himself/herself to a situation which evokes anxiety and he/she is encouraged to tolerate that situation without showing any avoidant behavior or response activation. Part of the efficacy of exposure therapy has been related to the effects of habit and habituation. In this regard Plato's ideas about habituation and Hamlet's words in Shakespeare's play are thoughtful and interesting. But the

history of exposure therapy as an intervention and clinical or practical use goes back to the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke, and psychiatrist such as Freud and Pierre Janet and the modern concept of exposure therapy began from Meyer's innovative work on the treatment of two patients: one with compulsive washing and another with blasphemous sexual obsessions. Today, there are many interesting and innovative explanations of this approach and technique in the framework of cognitive neuroscience.

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