

Read the article “Fear Factors.” Then read the folktale “Conquering Fear” and answer the questions that follow.

Fear Factors

by Jeanna Bryner

1 What gives you the creeps? Does the sight of a mouse cause you to break into a sweat? Does the thought of the dentist’s office send shivers up your spine?

2 Fears come in many varieties. At times, everyone feels afraid. In fact, about 6.3 million people in the United States have specific fears called phobias (FOE-bee-ahz). Scientists are still trying to figure out what causes phobias. One thing they do know: All fears cause a series of reactions inside your body.

3 Let’s take a closer look at what’s happening inside your body as your hair stands on end.

Fight or Flight

4 Believe it or not, fear can be good for you. Fear is your body’s way of protecting you from dangerous situations. “Mother Nature gave us all an alarm system. And that alarm system is fear,” says Michael Telch, the director of the Laboratory for the Study of Anxiety Disorders at the University of Texas.

5 How could fear be healthy? When you spot a growling dog, your body gets prepared for a fast escape. First, a small area in your brain called the amygdala (uh-MIG-duh-luh) sends out an “emergency siren” to your body.

6 Right away, your heart begins to beat faster. A racing heart sends more blood to your muscles. That way, you can run from that angry dog more easily. You will even start breathing heavily so your body takes in more oxygen—giving your muscles an extra boost.

7 Plus, you break out in a sweat. This sweat helps cool off your body, so you won’t get overheated. Your sweat is full of certain “fear” chemicals. And dogs can smell these chemicals. So dogs really can smell fear!

Forget It

8 Sometimes you get frightened in situations that are not dangerous. For instance, some teens are deathly afraid of speaking in public. If this fear of public speaking

keeps you from going out with friends, it is a type of phobia. “When you have fear of something that’s no threat and it interferes with your life, then it’s called a phobia,” says Telch.

9 What causes a person to have a phobia? Some scientists think that childhood experiences could be partly to blame for some phobias. A memory of a scary childhood event would get stored in your amygdala, in your brain. That grape-size area in the brain is considered the fear center. When you recall a past memory, your body prepares to flee.

10 “At times, that alarm system can go off when you’re not in any danger or harm,” says Telch.

Fear Not

11 Scientists and doctors are coming up with effective ways to help you overcome your phobias. If a person is very fearful of heights, the doctor will gradually have that person climb to a higher floor of a building.

12 “The person might be encouraged to go to the second floor and look over the railing,” explains Telch.

13 Over time, the person would realize that it’s not so scary to be up high.

14 Getting over your fears is a slow and complicated process.

CONQUERING FEAR

AN ETHIOPIAN FOLKTALE

1 **O**nce upon a time in an Ethiopian village, there lived a boy who was so shy and fearful of the world around him that his family called him Miobe, frightened one.

2 “Why do you call me that?” the boy asked his grandfather.

3 The old man laughed. “Because you are afraid.”

4 The boy’s grandmother, his mother, his father, and the neighbors said the same thing. Miobe pondered these words and decided he must find a way to conquer fear. So when everyone was asleep, he packed a sack and set off into the world to find out what he feared and to conquer it.



5 That night he slept under the wide umbrella of sky and stared up at the darkness.
Before drifting off, he whispered to himself, “I see you, but I will conquer you, fear.”

6 At midnight the wolves began to howl. The sound woke Miobe, but instead of
running away, he walked toward the sound, saying aloud, “I will conquer you, fear.”

7 He walked until the sun began to rise, and when he saw its golden orb, he smiled
with relief, for he had survived the first night. “I am becoming brave,” he said as he
walked on.

8 Soon he came to a village. For a moment he thought, “I don’t know these people
at all. They might be unkind to a stranger.” But he straightened up and walked right
into the village, saying aloud, “I will conquer you, fear.”

9 He walked into the village square, and there he found the village elders gathered,
muttering among themselves. As Miobe came near, they looked up and sneered, “Who
are you?”

10 “I’m traveling the world to become brave.”

11 The elders laughed. “Fool! No one can find bravery where it does not exist.”

12 “What do you mean?” Miobe asked.

13 The elders sighed unhappily. “We are finished,” said one old man. “Our village
is threatened by a monster up on the mountain.” Miobe followed the man’s gaze to
the top of the mountain. “See him, there,” the old man said. Miobe squinted. He did
not want to insult the man, but he saw nothing there.

14 “Look,” said another man. “See? It has the head of a crocodile. A monstrous
crocodile!”

15 “And his body is as horrible as a hippopotamus. A gigantic hippopotamus!”

16 “It’s like a dragon!” another man cried, “with fire shooting from its snout!”

17 Now Miobe began to see the monster. He began to see the smoke and fire, the
wrinkled skin, the fiery eyes. “I see,” he said, but silently he promised himself he
would not be afraid. So he walked away from the elders, into the village proper.

18 Everywhere people cowered. The little children hid inside, refusing to go to school.
“If the children go outside,” the women said, “the monster will come down from the
mountain and eat them. Everyone knows monsters eat children.”

19 The farmers hovered inside their doorways, hoes and rakes in hand; outside their
horses stood unharnessed. “We cannot work,” they told Miobe. “If we go into the
fields, the monster will come down and get us.”

20 Miobe saw wandering goats, sheep, and cows out at the edge of the village; no one came to milk them or tend to them. No one planted crops. Few left their homes, preferring to hide indoors. “The monster is as big as 10 barges!”* they whispered among themselves as Miobe listened. “The monster is going to destroy us!”

21 Finally Miobe decided it was up to him to destroy the monster. “I wish to conquer fear,” he announced, “and so I shall go slay the monster!”

22 “No, son, don’t do it!” the elders cried. “You will die.”

23 Miobe shivered and his heart fluttered, but he was determined.

24 “I must conquer fear!” he said, and he set off.

25 At the base of the mountain, he looked up and felt a chill. The monster looked bigger and more fiery than any dragon, fiercer than a pack of wolves or a nest of snakes. He remembered the days when he had been afraid. He took a deep breath and began to climb.

26 As he climbed, he looked up, but now he saw the monster seemed to be smaller. “How peculiar,” he said aloud. “My eyes are deceiving me.”

27 He continued to climb. When he was halfway up, he looked again. He squinted, shielding his eyes, but the monster’s eyes no longer seemed so fierce, and the flames no longer shot from its snout.

28 “The closer I get, the smaller he looks,” Miobe said, puzzled. He continued to climb, though now he pulled his dagger from his sack so that he would be prepared.

29 As he came around a bend in the path, he saw the summit before him.

30 He gasped. The monster had disappeared.

31 Miobe looked behind him. Surely the creature would sneak up from behind to attack. But when he turned, he saw nothing. He heard nothing. He held his breath.

32 He looked left. He looked right.

33 He continued to climb. At last he reached the summit and all was empty and quiet. Nothing was there. Suddenly he heard a sound at his feet. He looked down and saw a little creature—a toad with wrinkled skin and round, frightened eyes.

34 He bent down. “Who are you?” he asked. “How did you become so small?” The monster said nothing, so he cradled it in his hand and walked down the mountain.

35 When he reached the village, the people cried, “He’s safe!” and they surrounded him. Miobe held out his hand and showed them the tiny wrinkled toad. “This is the monster,” he said. . . .

* *barges* — huge boats used to carry goods