

**Press Release**

**For immediate release**

**22 November, 2010**



### **Gillian McKeith highlights stigma surrounding anxiety and phobias**

Gillian McKeith, star of *You Are What You Eat*, has recently sparked controversy over her anxiety and phobias in *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here*. Gillian, who admittedly suffers from a phobia of insects, water and heights, has repeatedly been selected by the public to participate in the programme's *Bushtucker Trials*, where campers must face extreme tasks such as eating crocodile eyes or touching lizards and spiders. These tasks have forced Gillian to face her fears but at times the prospect has been too much for her to bear, causing her to collapse and suffer panic attacks.

*"Gillian's experience in the Jungle highlights the ongoing, unfair stigma surrounding anxiety disorders," explains Anxiety UK CEO, Nicky Lidbetter. "Her apparent ridicule by the viewers of the programme shows how so many people don't seem to understand anxiety and phobias, and how it can affect people in extreme circumstances."*

Any phobia may produce a state of panic when the sufferer is confronted with the phobic object/situation. A wide variety of physical symptoms is experienced such as nausea, increased heartbeat and jelly legs. For this reason, many people with simple or specific phobias enter into a pattern of avoidance which can vary enormously in severity from someone who would not want to touch a spider, to someone who cannot even look at a picture of a spider in magazines, and therefore has to vet everything they come into contact with. The latter demonstrates just how debilitating even a simple phobia can be.

*Catherine O'Neill, Anxiety UK Services Manager adds, "While it is rare for someone with a phobia to suffer a "true faint" in reaction to facing their greatest fear, it is not uncommon for the panic to completely take a person over, causing them to suffer a raft of physical symptoms, including dizziness and jelly legs. This can then lead them to drop to the floor."*

On the positive side, facing ones' fears is considered by many to be the best way to overcome a phobia. Gillian's ordeal may, in fact, make her feel more at ease with her fears once she leaves the jungle. It also makes people consider how they perceive those with mental health difficulties and provide an opportunity to learn more about them.

To challenge mental health stigma, please post your experience at [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk) and visit [www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk).

**Ends**

#### **Contact**

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**Please let me know if you cover this story, as we are a small charity unable to afford media monitoring.**

## **Images/ Case studies/ Interviews with spokespeople available.**

### **Notes to Editors**

**Anxiety UK** is a national registered charity formed in 1970 by a sufferer of agoraphobia for those affected by anxiety disorders, and today is the leading authority on anxiety disorders and phobias in the UK. We are still a user-led organisation, run by sufferers and ex-sufferers of anxiety disorders.

Anxiety disorders are common and treatable, and Anxiety UK works to relieve and support those living with these conditions by providing information, support and understanding via an extensive range of services, including fast access to reduced cost 1:1 therapy services. The Anxiety UK helpline alone receives over 16,000 calls a year from people suffering from phobias and anxiety disorders.

We provide support to people with any anxiety condition, or specific phobia such as fear of spiders, blushing, vomiting, being alone, public speaking, heights - in fact, any fear that stops people from living their lives to the full.

### **Example case study**