Research findings
EXPOSURE COMBINED WITH MEDICATION SHOWS GOOD RESULTS FOR SPECIFIC CHILDHOOD PHOBIAS


WHAT WAS THE AIM?
Although tested in the adult population with good results, the idea of combining the medication D-cycloserine with exposure therapy in children to aid in fear extinction learning for specific phobias had not been tested. We wanted to see if positive results could be replicated in a 6-14 year old age group.

HOW DID WE DO IT?
A double blind test offering the D-cycloserine medication or a placebo was offered to 35 children aged between 6 and 14 before they received a single prolonged exposure session to their feared stimulus (i.e. either a spider or dog). A week later the children were exposed to a different stimulus (i.e. a different spider or dog). Avoidance and fear were measured via verbal report as the children moved closer to their feared stimulus.

WHAT DID WE FIND?
The children who had consumed D-cycloserine reported less fear and were better able to cope with their feared stimulus compared with those children who took the placebo.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?
Between 2-9% of young people develop a specific phobia. These findings mean that common fears, such as spiders, dogs, heights and flying may be treated more effectively for those children who combine D-cycloserine with exposure therapy. In clinical practice, the medication may be useful to improve engagement and motivation in therapy therefore providing a better chance of being anxiety free after treatment ends.