There are three stages to systematic desensitisation, the first is that the patient is taught deep muscle relaxation techniques and breathing exercises in order to relieve them of the tension caused by the fear response.

The second stage is that the patient creates a hierarchy of their phobia, starting with stimuli that would create the least anxiety and then build up the other stages up until the point where the patient would be the most afraid.

Finally, the patient should complete the table, starting with the thing that would make them feel the least fear and then work their way up to the point where they would feel the most fear. At each stage the patient uses the relaxation techniques that they learnt in stage one in order to remain calm and overcome their panic response in association to the object of their phobia.

At this point the patient should no longer feel anxious around the thing that they were afraid of and their phobia should be affectively cured. Some steps of the hierarchy that they created usually get repeated before the patient can move on so systematic desensitisation usually takes around 4-6 sessions but can go up to 12 sessions in the case of a severe phobia.

The exposure to the stimulus can be done in one of two ways depending on the way that the client want to do it and the severity of the phobia these ways are:

- In vitro – the client imagines exposure to the phobic stimulus.
- In vivo – the client is actually exposed to the phobic stimulus.

Research has found that the in vivo techniques are the most effective ways to cure phobias however the in vitro technique is often more practical, especially if the patient has more obscure phobias.

**Tranquillisers**

Tranquillisers are a form of medication which can be taken in order to reduce the panic response of a phobia. They are usually only used if the patient has a very severe anxiety due to their phobia which is causing them considerable problems in their day-to-day lived. The most common type of tranquilliser a patient may be given under these circumstances is a benzodiazepine tranquilliser, such as diazepam (Valium), to reduce anxiety.