



Psychology

Fear of Flying

There are many people who fear flying around the world. It is also known as aerophobia. Depending on the intensity of their phobia they may either avoid air travel altogether or may only be able to fly with the aid of alcohol or medication.

For some this is inconvenient or embarrassing. For others it is a major block – as when their aerophobia prevents them and their families going on holidays together.

In some cases fear of flying can have a major impact on a person's career – they will avoid or turn down promotion or will not even apply for positions that might require them to travel by plane.

What is Fear of Flying?

First of all, it is not the inability to travel in a plane! Most 'fearful flyers' do actually fly - although they find it a very uncomfortable experience.

How each person experiences fear of flying will differ considerably and can range from a mild concern, that

passes once you have made the decision to fly, to a powerful and over-powering fear that makes air travel an impossibility.

A phobia is an intense fear of something that, in reality, poses little or no actual danger. Other common phobias and fears include closed-in places, heights, highway driving, flying insects, snakes, and needles. However, we can develop phobias of virtually anything. Most phobias develop in childhood, but they can also develop in adults.

If you have a phobia, you probably realize that your fear is unreasonable, yet you still can't control your feelings. Just thinking about the thing you fear may make you anxious. And when you're actually exposed to your phobia, the terror is automatic and overwhelming.

What are Common Signs & Symptoms?

- **Shortness of breath**
- **Chest pain**

Topic of the Month

- **Nausea**
- **Sweating**
- **Trembling**
- **Fear of losing control**
- **Fear of dying**
- **Numbness or tingling**
- **Feeling unsteady or faint**
- **Feeling of choking**
- **Hot or Cold flashes**

What causes fear of flying?

Fear of flying is a learned fear - many people who are nervous flyers or are phobic of flying were once comfortable and confident air travelers.

The person might have had a bad experience in a plane once which he/she finds difficult to let go of.

You might have suffered from an intense anxiety attack during one of your flights that you become ap-

-prehensive of re-experiencing the same panic attack again.

Hearing about bad events such as a plane crash can also be sufficient enough to start creating a fear of flying.

There can be many other reasons someone can develop a fear of flying that might not have been related to an actual negative experience during a flight itself, which would call for an underlying exploratory work.

You can learn how to manage your fears

A flying phobia can be resolved. You do not have to 'learn to live with it'. Nor do you have to continue holding yourself back from the convenience of air travel or from holidays or career advancement that involve travel by air.

The quickest way of getting past your fear of flying is to seek the assistance of someone who specializes in this area.

Psychotherapy:

The most frequently used treatment for phobias is a type of cognitive-behavioral therapy called systematic desensitization or exposure therapy. This treatment is very effective.

According to the National

Institute of Mental Health, about 75% of people are able to overcome their phobias through cognitive-behavioral therapy.

The more psychodynamic therapies could also be helpful as a combined approach with CBT.

Hypnotherapy:

This can be a very efficient method to apply in combination with cognitive behavioural therapy as a tool to reinforce the changes as well as offer an opportunity to work through any existing underlying issue. You can find out more about hypnotherapy by reading [March 2011 issue on Hypnotherapy](#).

Airline courses:

Some airlines run courses and your travel agent of local airport may be able to point you in their direction. These courses are often a blend of group support, factual information from experienced pilots, relaxation training, and (often) the option to take a short flight at the end of the course. They work fine for some and they do have a drawback in that they rarely address the real cause of the fear - how a person uses their imagination.

Self-Help:

Learning specific relaxation techniques, listening to spe-

-cialized recordings or even reading books about anxiety can be of added benefit.

It is important to seek professional advice from people trained in the field.

If your fear doesn't really impact your life that much, it's probably nothing to be concerned about. But if avoidance of flying interferes with your normal functioning or keeps you from doing things you would otherwise enjoy, it's time to seek help.

Reference:

Anderson, P. et al.. (2006). 'Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Fear of Flying: Sustainability of Treatment Gains After September 11'. Behavior Therapy; 37 1(1): 91-97,