

Flying in the shadow of fear

The recent talk of volcanic ash clouds potentially causing aeroplane engine failure can strike fear in even the most relaxed traveller, but those who suffer from fear of flying may feel happier booking the nearest bicycle than going airborne. As holiday season hots up, Julia Jones looks at ways to tackle our most common fears.

Of course, we all have fears, for example we may feel anxious when a wasp is hovering too close. These everyday fears are our in-built way of keeping safe - they tell us wasps are dangerous, so we give them a wide berth and don't get stung.

However, sometimes our fears of an object or situation become so intense they prevent us from carrying on our daily lives and we may experience worrying physical symptoms too.

SYMPTOMS OF FEAR AND PHOBIA

According to www.nhs24.com people who suffer from intense fears may shake; feel confused or disoriented; and have rapid heart beats, dry mouth, intense sweating, difficulty breathing, nausea, dizziness and chest pain. Some sufferers may also fear losing control, fainting or dying. These symptoms are commonly experienced by those with anxieties such as fear and phobia.

COMMON FEARS

Some of the more common phobias include fear of animals, flying, the dark, open spaces, heights, public speaking and illness. Many are things we experience in our everyday lives while others are things we rarely encounter.

WHEN TO ACT

People with an intense fear of snakes, may live for decades in the UK without ever coming face to face with one. They may go about their daily lives giving little thought to our reptile friends.

Others who fear flying may decide to travel all day on buses and trains solely to avoid the more convenient two-hour flight option they would have preferred to take, or they may choose to miss out on their holiday of a lifetime because they can't face the flight. When a fear becomes so intense it disrupts chosen plans in this way, it's time to act.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

It is generally accepted the only way to tackle fear is to face it. However this doesn't mean sticking your hand in a wasps nest or wrapping a snake around your neck.

A popular approach for treating people experiencing

intense fear is desensitization - a technique commonly associated with cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). Desensitization is best undertaken in consultation with a professional experienced in this area. It involves slow, controlled exposure to the situation or object of fear so over time it feels more comfortable.

Talking therapies to understand the route of the fear and how to manage it can also be helpful.

SELF HELP

It often helps to imagine the worst that could happen if your fears are realised.

Talking to friends and family and explaining your fears may make you feel more in control and give them an understanding of what you are experiencing.

Relaxation techniques may help with general anxiety and stress. Often people report their fears increase when they are stressed or anxious so taking time to relax can really help particularly if you are experiencing physical symptoms.

Regular exercise and a well-balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables will help aid relaxation and can also improve some of the physical symptoms of fear.

Reading: Overcome your fear of flying, 2009, Professor Robert Bor, Dr Carina Eriksen and Margaret Oakes, Sheldon Press.

Whatever route you choose to help conquer your fear, one thing is clear, avoidance is not the answer - well not unless you live in the UK and have a fear of aardvarks!

MORE INFORMATION

1. Our First Psychology centres can help you. To find out more or to arrange an initial session contact us at your local centre:

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