

Tips

Conquer your fear of flying

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The doors and seatbelts are fastened. The crew is halfway through the safety demonstration.

Do you get an adrenalin rush at the thought of being 10,000 metres high in less than 10 minutes?

Or, is your heart racing and your palms sweating at the thought of putting your life in the hands of the guys in the cockpit?

When you tell people you are afraid of flying, the standard response is: "Flying is safer than taking a bus." The International Air Transport Association's chief safety officer Gunther Matschnigg recently told Reuters: "If you were to take a flight every day, the odds are that you would fly 14,000 years without an accident."

I recently met an elderly Maltese couple who have never left Malta - bar a trip to Gozo or Sicily by ferry. Why? Not because they don't want to travel or see new places. Simply because the thought of flying terrifies them. Often, this fear is traced to one or more of these issues: lack of control, claustrophobia, fear of lifts, fear of heights or fear of falling.

Even seasoned travellers can develop aerophobia (a fear of flying). During the past 10 years, I've taken over 1,000 flights on everything from four-seater Cessna planes in the African bush and water planes over the atolls in the Maldives to propeller planes in the North Pole and A380s.

I've also survived domestic flights on Tupolevs and Ilyushins in Russia and former Soviet states where 'extra' passengers stand during the flight; experienced aborted landings and one emergency landing.

However, it just takes one bad flight to shake up even a frequent traveller. For me, that was an experience in southern Sweden five years ago.

After two rollercoaster descents and failed landing attempts in storm force winds, we finally hit the runway narrowly missing the air traffic control tower. This was the first - and only - time I ever thought I was going to die in a plane crash.



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After such an experience, the first thing you need to do - even though it's probably the last thing you will feel like doing - is to get

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back up in the air again as soon as possible. The good news is that there are some solutions that can help you conquer your fears.

One-day boot camp

If you Google 'fear of flying courses' there are hundreds of online, classroom and simulator courses run by private schools and commercial airlines. British Airways, for example, claims that 98 per cent of all

participants are cured after its one-day course.

Very often, people are afraid of flying due to lack of knowledge about how an aircraft flies and operates. A BA pilot talks participants through the technicalities and things like turbulence; the clinical psychologist shows how to minimise symptoms like anxiety and claustrophobia in flight and shares relaxation techniques.

Later on in the day, there's a short flight accompanied by a pilot, crew and the psychologist.

Hypnotherapy

Then, there is hypnotherapy - a form of psychology used to shift the way a person thinks unconsciously. Hypnotherapist Deborah Marshall-Warren has met many people terrified of flying during her 17-year career. She implies that people often brainwash themselves into thinking they are afraid of flying: "Language is often as important as the food we put into our mouths. It can be nutritional or toxic," she explains.

"With fear of flying, it's rarely due to turbulence. Okay, it can be, but it very rarely is. Fear of flying is usually due to an extremely traumatic set of circumstances that get tangled together with the experience of a flight," she explains.

"For example, it may be separation from family, the arrival back at your home airport, having spent a long-haul flight worrying about an impending event ahead of you. This could be surgery, a funeral, an event that has conjured up extreme emotional turbulence."

Unlike the airline-run courses, Ms Marshall-Warren sits the aerophobiac in her magic chair. After using her relaxation techniques, she 'takes' them on a short 40-minute flight to Catania or Trapani. Building up an imaginary flight scenario, she lets her client meet the captain or first officer.

"I tell them that they also have a family that they want to go home to. The uniform gives them an aura of presence and reliability. When flying, you hand over your safety to someone else, so I want my client to

understand that this person has a lot of experience."

After the session, she encourages them to take a flight to test the therapy. "When they come back, they might say it was okay for take-off, not for landing; so we do a follow-up scenario focusing on landing, for example."

Two quick fixes

If you are short on time or money, there are two other simple over-the-counter remedies that can help to ease flying nerves.

The first is Rescue Remedy, a herbal potion which is specially designed to calm and relax in stressful or traumatic situations. The second - and my personal favourite - is a glass of red wine.

Most experts say you should avoid caffeine and alcohol during flights to stay hydrated. However, one glass of red wine per day has been proven to have relaxation-inducing properties.

Not only will a glass relax you before or during the flight, it can also help you to sleep. Just don't go overboard and knock back a whole bottle or you'll just end up feeling ill and irritate the crew and your fellow passengers.

Flying might not always be fun but it is very safe and can be very enjoyable. There's nothing better than escaping from normal life and the excitement of heading off to visit a new country.

So, sit back in your seat with a glass of red wine, look out the window and enjoy that stunning sunset or snow-peaked mountains.

Just relax, knowing that you're in safe hands and off to see that destination you have always dreamed of.

For more info...

British Airways Flying with Confidence: <http://flyingwithconfidence.com>

Free online courses: www.fearofflying.com

Deborah Marshall-Warren's hypnotherapy sessions: www.marshall-warren.com

Rescue Remedy: www.rescuerecovery.com