

Coping with a Fear of Flying

This information is written by Liz Rosies RGN and designed to support, not replace, the relationship that exists between a patient and his/her existing Travel Health Specialist for more Travel Health information see www.travelhealth.co.uk

In a recent survey 20% of those travelling admitted to a fear of flying, although it would be fair to suggest that post September 11th that figure is probably higher. For many it is the complete loss of control as they put their life in the hands of an airline. For others it is the fear of a closed space and being unable to get up and go outside as and when they want. Whatever the fear, it is real to the person involved and can become particularly distressing when it is hidden from work colleagues for fear of losing a job when frequent air travel is required, or prevents you from taking the holiday of your dreams.

The first important point is to recognise you have a fear and face up to it. Try to discover what it is about flying that you do not like and admit that you have a problem. On facing the fear it might be time to invest in a day course on fear of flying at your local airport, or discuss your problem with someone you trust.

Try to look at the problem logically - air transport is very safe. You are about 1000 times more likely to be killed in a road accident than you are in an air accident. This does not mean that air disasters do not occur. They do, the trouble is that they become a part of our lives when they are beamed into our living room.

Plan your travel in advance

If you are travelling by air for the first time, try a practice run to the airport. This will help you go through the procedure without the distress of having to arrive for the first time. It will help you see the best place to park or how far you have to walk from the railway station, as well as allowing you to see how smoothly things run in an airport. On the day you will know exactly where to go and it will help alleviate those 'first time' fears.

Try to recognise that stress can add to fears. Plan your trip well and book your seats in advance. Arrive in plenty of time for your flight and always allow for delays when you travel. Carry a book or magazine in your hand luggage and have letters to write while you wait. If you feel anxious, take a portable CD or cassette with calming music to listen to while you are waiting. Never find yourself stranded at the airport with nothing to do.

When booking a flight, choose an airline that you can have faith in. Most accidents occur in parts of the world where equipment and technology is less advanced than in the West. If you have to travel a long distance by air try to avoid connecting flights. A little extra money spent on a direct flight is worth the expense if it means no added anxiety about possible delays or missed connections.

Try not to use alcohol or drugs to escape your fear. Often they can make it worse and leave you feeling unnaturally anxious.

Some in-flight radio stations now provide calming, relaxation techniques for anxious flyers - tune into this channel if you feel anxious. Other in-flight techniques include reflexology, aromatherapy or massage now offered by selective airlines.

Avoid Health Concerns

Make sure you have visited your family doctor or nurse for general health advice. Sort out any required vaccinations and discuss malaria prevention well in advance of your trip. If you are at risk of DVT, discuss prevention with your doctor or nurse.

If you have any disabilities, contact the airline in advance of your trip to discuss special requirements such as wheelchairs or assistance on and off the plane.

If you are suffering from any form of psychological illness or depression, it is important that you talk it over with your doctor and consider postponing your trip until you feel better.

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