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[Live Well]

Fearless Travelers

Some fears are healthy. Fear keeps you from darting into oncoming traffic, eating dodgy street food, and petting rattlesnakes. "Everybody has fear. We wouldn't survive without it," says Tom Corboy, MFT, executive director of the OCD Center of Los Angeles (ocdla.com).

But fear that keeps you from holding the strap on the subway, strolling a crowded street, or getting on an airplane might be a phobia. These types of fears can make it difficult to travel.

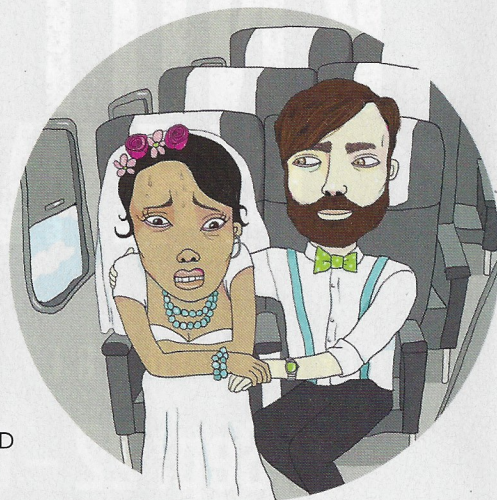
The more you avoid your fears, the bigger they'll seem. But dulling your senses with preflight drinks won't work either. Corboy has met anxious clients who, after drunkenly bailing on flights just as the crew was closing the plane doors, became convinced that their fear was unconquerable.

The preferred treatment for overcoming phobias is to face fears through exposure therapy, which involves introducing someone slowly to the experience causing the anxiety. And because the exposure is gradual, the time to start is months, not weeks, before you need to travel. Don't go to your scariest place right off the bat.

One common scenario is the bride or groom who has promised a soon-to-be spouse a honeymoon trip, but is afraid to fly. People are coached to challenge their thoughts when the fear kicks in, calm the breathing, and mindfully sit with the discomfort rather than fleeing from it. The fearful person practices these techniques as they take increasingly longer flights until he or she can fly with ease.

Therapists use similar techniques to help calm other fears, such as motorphobia (fear of car travel), mysophobia (fear of germs), or agoraphobia (fear of crowds). But the goal isn't to teach people not to be afraid. "We actually want them to feel anxious and feel strong enough to handle it," says Corboy.

Fears of cars, germs, and crowds are often easier to treat than fear of flying because of the logistics involved. But if you're motivated, you can learn to conquer them. One of Corboy's patients—a man whose fear had kept him grounded for 35 years—was able to overcome his phobia through exposure therapy. "He flies all the time now," Corboy says. Consult your health care professional about phobia treatment options. —Christina Elston



[Free Fun]

Sometimes we miss our pets when we travel. **The Jefferson, Washington, D.C.**, helps by presenting kiddos ages 8 and younger with a wagon filled with stuffed animals upon arrival at the luxury hotel. Each child may pick one free plush toy to take along on his or her travels. One of the toys usually available is a beagle plush animal that's a nod to Monti, the property's rescue-beagle pet mascot. 1200 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C. (202) 448-2300; jeffersondc.com. —Elisabeth Abrahamson