

Fear of Flying

UNDERSTANDING IT · WORKING THROUGH IT

Clinically known as **aviophobia** (also called **aerophobia**) – a specific phobia involving intense, persistent fear of flying.

Fear of flying is common and highly treatable. Most people with this fear are not actually afraid the plane will crash – they are afraid of the overwhelming anxiety itself, or of losing control. Understanding what drives the fear is often the first step toward working through it.

WHAT IS AVIOPHOBIA?

An intense, persistent fear of flying that is out of proportion to the actual risk, and lasts six months or longer. It's classified as a specific phobia, a type of anxiety disorder.

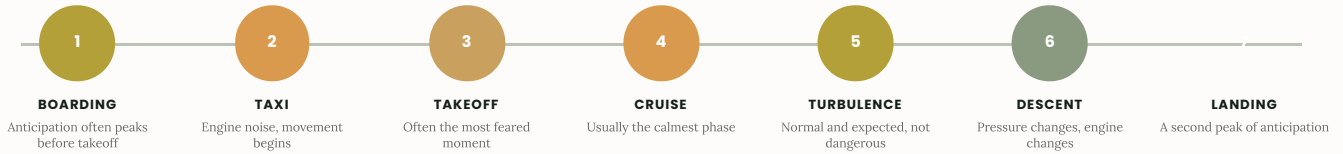
WHAT IT'S OFTEN REALLY ABOUT

Rarely the plane itself. More often: fear of losing control, of enclosed spaces, of heights, of panic attacks, or of not being able to escape if something goes wrong.

HOW COMMON IS IT?

Very. Estimates suggest between one in five and one in three people experience some fear of flying during their life, ranging from mild unease to avoidance altogether.

A FLIGHT, PHASE BY PHASE



Fear rarely stays constant through a flight – it tends to rise and fall with each phase. Knowing your own pattern can help you prepare targeted coping strategies for the moments that matter most to you.

COMMON TRIGGERS

- Turbulence or unexpected movement
- Engine noise or unfamiliar sounds
- Enclosed space, feeling trapped
- News coverage of air incidents
- Past difficult flight experiences
- Loss of control over the situation

HOW IT SHOWS UP

- Racing heart, sweating, nausea
- Catastrophic thoughts ("something will go wrong")
- Avoidance of booking or boarding flights
- Panic symptoms before or during travel
- Excessive checking (weather, safety records)

THE FACTS

- Commercial air travel has among the lowest fatality rates of any transport mode
- Turbulence, while uncomfortable, is a normal and expected part of flight
- Pilots are highly trained for a very wide range of conditions

EVIDENCE-BASED WAYS TO WORK THROUGH IT

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – identifying and questioning catastrophic thoughts
- Graduated exposure – approaching flying in small, manageable steps
- Learning about how flight actually works, and the safety statistics
- Breathing and grounding techniques for use before and during a flight
- Virtual reality exposure therapy, where available
- Support from a therapist experienced in treating specific phobias

MY EXPOSURE PLAN

List steps from least to most anxiety-provoking. Rate expected distress (SUDS 0–100).

#	STEP	SUDS (0–100)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

WHICH PHASE OF A FLIGHT WORRIES ME MOST, AND WHY?

ONE COPING STRATEGY I WANT TO TRY BEFORE MY NEXT FLIGHT

SOURCES

Cleveland Clinic. *Aerophobia (Fear of Flying): Causes, Symptoms & Treatment*. my.clevelandclinic.org. · American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.).