

Are you afraid of heights? What about flying, or public speaking?

Dr. Brian Doyle is a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical School. And he says about 12% of all Americans have a phobia - an intense fear of something that triggers symptoms like nausea, sweating, shaking, and dizziness. He says about 20% of phobias go away on their own. But for the ones that don't, you CAN get a grip on them. Here's how, courtesy of Fitness magazine.

- **You're afraid of heights.** Sheryl R. Jackson is a clinical psychologist at the University of Alabama. And she says one of our brain's jobs is to keep us away from dangerous situations. So having a fear of heights is one way we avoid the danger of falling. In fact, even bungee jumpers are afraid – they've just channeled their fear into excitement. So, if you have to cross a bridge or go into a high rise office, think about how many people have stood there before you and been just fine. Also, don't look at your feet - it'll make you feel woozy. And get something cold to drink. Jackson says that'll shift your focus and help you calm down.
- **Flying.** Harold Stenitz is co-director of the Stress Disorders Institute of Maryland. And he says people who are afraid to fly confuse the possibility of an event with the PROBABILITY of it. Yes, the plane could crash or be hijacked, but it's very improbable. So, to feel in control and calm the next time you fly, ask for a seat in front of the wings where turbulence feels milder. And if you hit a bump, sway with the motion instead of stiffening up, which makes it seem more intense.
- **Public speaking.** Whether it's 6 people or 600 – standing alone in front of a crowd is nerve-racking. So here's some advice from public speaking consultant Till Kahrs. He says as you speak, look at one person at a time. Then for every sentence or separate thought, shift your gaze to someone else. Most people make the mistake of letting their eyes roam constantly around the room, but this builds tension because it overstimulates the brain. Also, use hand gestures as you talk. They can release tension, and also make you look like a more dynamic speaker.