

Free yourself from debilitating fears

Fear is the greatest hindrance for us as human beings to underachieve, to not achieve our goals or not become the best we can be. Fear is a normal feeling when being in a situation that is dangerous. However, fear can also make us feel paralysed, out of control or cause panic attacks when we have had a bad experience and we are afraid that this situation might occur again. In such instances it can inhibit us from moving forward, doing our work properly, socialise with friends or family or feel confident.

Leanne Belling, who suffered from flight anxiety has overcome her fears and feels like a new person now.

Leanne's story: I never had a problem with flying, day or night, no matter the weather or distance. A few years ago, I was on a flight from Johannesburg to Durban, the flight was scheduled to leave at 7pm, but due to the severe storm and rain we were delayed by an hour, and departed around 8pm. At the time, I was not worried, I boarded the plane, we took off and I assumed we would be home in an hour.

The take-off was very bumpy due to the weather and 15 minutes into the flight, the Captain announced that we needed to remain in our seats as there was a bad electrical storm ahead and they were going to fly us around it. The flight at that stage was very turbulent, we went through many air pockets and were being shaken around quite badly with lots of lightning bolts all around us. There were some luggage compartments that opened with bags falling out, resembling something out of a horror movie.

There was a really loud bang and massive shudder through the plane, it was suddenly very hot and the air hostesses started running around frantically and were looking rather pale themselves. It was at this point the fear of God was instilled in me and I realised we had a problem. The Captain came back on and announced that we were descending to 10 000 feet as we had lost cabin pressure and that anyone wearing a neck tie or jersey should remove and loosen the items, they recommended the bags to assist with breathing. I suddenly realised that this "could be it" and I may never see any of my loved ones again.

Everyone on the plane was in a panic at this stage and everyone was hysterical, myself included. Strangers were holding hands and praying in support for one another in the terrifying moments where none of us knew if we would survive it. Once we had descended to 10 000 feet, they proceeded to go through the emergency landing brace position. The rest of the flight was really rough, and seemed like it took forever for us to reach Durban. Total flying time 1 hour 45 minutes.

On arrival at the Durban Airport (old Durban airport), we were cleared for landing, as we descended to the runway, all I remember seeing were rows and rows of emergency vehicles, ambulances and fire engines. The landing was extremely rough, and when the plane came to a stop, everyone on board clapped and cheered for the pilot. The plane was parked and we were all ushered out the back and around the opposite side to the engine that was struck by lightning with beacons demarcating the wing which looked damaged. I was so happy to see my mom and I sobbed like a baby when I hugged her and held onto her.

Since that unfortunate flight, I have battled with a serious struggle whenever I needed to fly for business, to the point where in a period of about 8 or more years I have never flown on that airline again. In some instances I deliberately missed a flight or two in the hope I wouldn't have to go. My doctor prescribed tranquilisers that were to calm me down before a flight, they didn't work so I used

to have a few drinks as well no matter the time of day, just to gain enough courage to actually set foot on a plane. Before I flew I used to be on edge for weeks before the actual flight, a complete nervous wreck, and drive everyone around me insane. On the day of the flight I was very teary and nervous, I battled with anxiety, sweaty palms, uncontrollable panic attacks and uncontrollable tears.

Once actually on the plane, I would do random things, like check the condition of the outside of the plane, touch the plane as I entered to feel for myself that it was solid, ask the airhostesses what the weather was like and whether or not we were expecting a turbulent flight, their answer usually sent me into a panic. I would sit down and fasten my seatbelt and then proceed to grasp the arm rests while my heart pounded so hard that it felt as though it would jump out of my chest. My hands were shaky and sweaty, I had this uncomfortable tingly sensation down my throat and neck with a paralysing effect on my arms. So bad that I would keep saying I want to get off.

Any sounds in the plane or on the outside prior to take off would make me start crying as the fear of the flight getting closer got worse. I could never envision arriving on the other side safely, every time I left my family to fly I would imagine that I was not going to make it and it would be the last thing I ever did. As the engines started I would end up in a complete panic and sob my way through the take off. Every time there was a bump or noise I would get such a fright and my heart would pound even faster. By the time the drinks were served I would ask for 2 hunters dry or 2 bottles of wine and drink them as fast as I could, on top of the tranquilisers and alcohol I had already consumed, to further “numb away” the fear. Whenever we landed I couldn’t wait to get off and felt the most immense relief when my feet touched the ground.

I ended up in a position at work that required me to fly very often instead of the usual twice a year, beginning with 18 flights in 7 weeks on all kinds of planes to all kinds of airports big and small. After the initial flights I would be required to fly 2 to 3 times per month to Johannesburg and Cape Town. I was in a complete tail spin to the point where I started going for interviews as the thought of flying that much scared me to death. Added to this, I faced continuous ridicule from my fellow colleagues, people think that having a fear of flying is silly, they’d laugh and make a mockery of it and me, which makes it even worse to face or talk about.

A friend of mine suggested that I try hypnotherapy and recommended Andrea Kellerman from EQ Advantedge. So a week before the 18 flight marathon began I booked my first appointment. I met her and we went through all the details of what exactly it was that scared me and how I felt when I was overcome with fear. During my first hypnotherapy session Andrea recorded the actual hypnotherapy part onto a CD, and I religiously listened to it every night before the first flight.

I was very nervous before the first flight as I had never used hypnotherapy and I didn’t know how I would react on that flight. It was difficult, but I managed to fly with no medication or alcohol. I was still sweaty, heart pounding, getting a fright with every bump and worrying I would not arrive safely, but there was a huge difference even from session 1. I continued with my CD and booked another session. I became calmer, could book my flights without having a panic attack, was able to check in feeling calm, got on the plane without feeling that I needed to get off and managed my emotions so much better.

On about the 5th or 6th flight I realised that I did not need any form of medication or alcohol anymore and I realised that I was making good progress. Every flight I took from there on was a step towards my recovery. I didn’t need to drink, I chose to drink and I chose to drink only half at a normal pace.

Slowly but surely with each and every flight, my fear diminished and my hands stopped sweating, I didn’t cry any more or get nervous with every bump or sound. I slowly worked my way through all of

the issues and the reactions one by one over a 6 month period, and now I don't worry about flying, I don't touch the plane or ask the hostesses about the weather, I do not worry whether it is day or night, I do not pay attention to the actual weather. None of those things bother me anymore, and I find that I now speak to people and say, I used to be scared of flying, but now I actually enjoy it.

On the 22 April 2016 marked my 6 months of hypnotherapy with Andrea Kellerman, I snuggled in with my pillow and blankie and I fell asleep for about half an hour. This was the final hurdle that we have been trying to overcome, and I did it 😊

On the 17 May 2016, I will be boarding a plane on the airline that I had a terrible experience with and I will be facing and conquering my ultimate fear. The ticket is booked and I am feeling confident about it. I am looking forward to achieving my ultimate goal.

Andrea Kellerman has been a great pillar of support and strength through my journey of recovery, and was on each and every flight with me, supporting me on WhatsApp before and after every flight. Now I message her after I have been and come back, and sometimes a day or two after and still share my small successes with her. Hypnotherapy is an amazing tool to choose and if you really do want to overcome your fears, I recommend you give it a try 😊. It is easy, non-invasive and it has changed my life forever. I can just recommend it to anyone who has fears, want to achieve goals and is serious about having a better life.