Cognitive - behavioral treatment for fear of flying in Iceland

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“Enjoy Flying”

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Sponsored by Icelandair
Assessment process

• Two questionnaires Flight Anxiety Situation (FAS) and Flight Anxiety Modality (FAM)

• Applied in every session of the course, during the flight and after six months
The treatment plan

Pre -> 1 -> 2 -> 3 -> 4

visit visit

Graduation flight
Each session of the course is a combination of:

• Behavioural methods to deal with fear

• Cognitive methods: getting to know your thinking pattern and how to modify it

• Information on flying, safety and weather conditions
Session one

- A short lecture on phobias
- The participants share their experience
- Progressive relaxation is introduced
- Flight information:
  - Principles of flying and aerodynamics
- Homework assignment:
  - Relaxation training
Session two

- Relaxation exercise, diaphragmatic breathing
- Flight information:
  - Weather, types of airlines, air-traffic rules, safety measures
- Thinking and cognitive processes:
  - Wrong interpretation leads to and provokes fear when flying
Session two

• Visit to air-traffic control centre

• Homework assignments:
  – Relaxation training continued
  – Make notes on internal dialogue when anxious
Session three

• Applied relaxation:
  – Breathing and hyperventilation

• Flight information:
  – Pilot training, aircraft maintenance etc.

• Cognitive restructuring and change:
  – Safety behaviour
Session three

• Visit to the airport, embarking an aeroplane,

• Homework:
  – Relaxation continued
  – Tasks on cognitive restructuring and safety behavior
Session four

- Relaxation report - cue controlled relaxation
- Thought stopping
- The flight trip systematically described from A to Z
- Decision making and determination
- Homework assignment:
  - Relaxation training, reading instructions and practicing thought stopping
The graduation flight

- Regular international flight from Keflavik
- Back and forth on the same day
- Each way is 2.5 to 3.5 hours
- Trip amounts to 12 hours including transfer to airport and transit waiting
- Course leaders stay with the group the whole trip
6 month evaluation

- Feed back on the treatment program
- Number of flights in the 6 months
- Answering FAS and FAM questionnaires
Participants of the course

- 206 completed the course, 156 women and 50 men
- 174 answered in the follow-up or 84.5%
- Age range 16 to 73
Flight Anxiety Situation

- FAS 1 initial test
- FAS 2 graduation flight
- FAS 3 after six months
Flight Anxiety Situation

• Decrease of flight anxiety from initial test to graduation flight: 61 points
  95% confidence interval 55.5 - 66.5

• Decrease of flight anxiety from initial test to six month test: 55 points
  95% confidence interval 47.7 – 62.3
Flight Anxiety Modality

FAM 1 initial test
FAM 2 graduation flight
FAM 3 after six months
Flight Anxiety Modality

• Decrease of anxiety symptoms from initial test to graduation flight: 40 points
  95% confidence interval 37.9 – 42.9

• Decrease of anxiety symptoms from initial test to six month test: 37 points
  95% confidence interval 34.8 – 39.9
Number of flights in the six month period after the course

- 88% had made one or more flight trips
- 64% had made two or more flight trips
Comments and reflections

- Who are attending the treatment?
- Who did not finish the course?
- Are concomitant phobias important?