

Agoraphobia Exposure



[Blog](#)

[Forum](#)

[Reader's Questions](#)

[Guest Post](#)

[Coaching](#)

[Subscribers](#)

BLOG POST ARCHIVE

VOLUME

2

CONTENTS

Click on a post title to jump to it

- * [Feeling Nervous And Excited At The Same Time](#)
- * [Should You Have A Plan B?](#)
- * [Don't Second Guess Yourself](#)
- * [Do Easy Versions Of Difficult Journeys](#)
- * [Don't Be A Professional Victim](#)
- * [Keep A Record Of Your Journeys](#)
- * [Scale Down, Repeat And Stretch](#)
- * [Exposure Means Being Present In Your Environment](#)
- * [Reader's Question : Fear Of Traveling Abroad](#)
- * [Anxiety Is Like The Weather](#)

Feeling Nervous And Excited At The Same Time



Strange things can happen during exposures. And the more of them you do, the more often you'll find yourself confused or pleasantly surprised. For example, feeling both nervous and excited at the same time.

I remember one particular time. I was walking around in an area that I wasn't too familiar with, but which wasn't too far from a street where I knew I could get a bus home. In other words, I was a bit disoriented but I knew I couldn't get too lost. It was a sunny day, and I was in a generally good mood.

At one point I started to get nervous, and I was about to tell myself to snap out of it, stop being silly, you're not that far from familiar ground. But then for some reason I started to feel excited, pleased with how I was doing, and optimistic. However, the nervousness remained.

As I walked along, I felt pulled in two different directions, so I chose to go with the excitement. I thought, why not. If the nervousness is that much of an issue, I'm sure it will take over, but in the meantime, how about I just act according to the positive feeling.

It was a good move. I made a choice to feel good seeing as the feeling was already there, and within a few moments the nervousness faded away.

So what was going on? I think my amygdala was confused. I had done so many exposures by that time that I guess it didn't know what to think any more.

Your amygdala is always trying to protect you, but for those with agoraphobia it's not doing so correctly because it's too sensitive and is prone to overreacting. If you repeatedly put yourself in potentially anxious situations, it forces your amygdala to have a rethink.

The nervousness that I felt was a remnant of the old way of thinking, while the excitement was my real self emerging and starting to become the norm. But for it to fully become the norm you have to go with it. Don't side with the nervousness, side with the confidence, because that's your true self.

The reason why I felt both at the same time was because that's what can happen when you go through a change. It's a transition. It's to be expected, it's normal. So when you find yourself feeling nervous and positive simultaneously you should be glad, and you should step into the confidence to see where it takes you.

Should You Have A Plan B?



You've planned a journey and you're ready to go. You're not 100% sure that you'll be able to make it but you're going to try. You're feeling hopeful but nervous. And then it occurs to you. Should you have a plan B in case you decide to back out at some point? Or would having one mean that you're planning to fail?

You could argue that having an alternative gives you an excuse to avoid doing what you planned. It gives you permission to always resort to doing easier journeys rather than more challenging ones.

But you could also say that having a plan B is better than all-or-nothing. Why make it a choice between doing the original journey and staying at home. At least with a plan B you get to do something.

I think both are true. I guess it depends on your personality and how you see things, but personally I don't see a problem with having an alternative route to a destination, or even a different journey altogether, in the event of feeling too scared to stick to an original plan.

There may be times when you feel like pushing yourself, in which case you may not want an alternative option. That's fine. It's up to you and only you know how you feel at any particular time.

I know that it's not a nice feeling when you let yourself down. However I don't think it's helpful to put yourself under more pressure than necessary. And feeling guilty or feeling like a coward won't do you any good. So do what you like. If you feel the need to have a plan B go ahead and have one.

I don't think you should be too quick to resort to a plan B every time you're faced with a

challenging journey, but I see nothing wrong with having one.

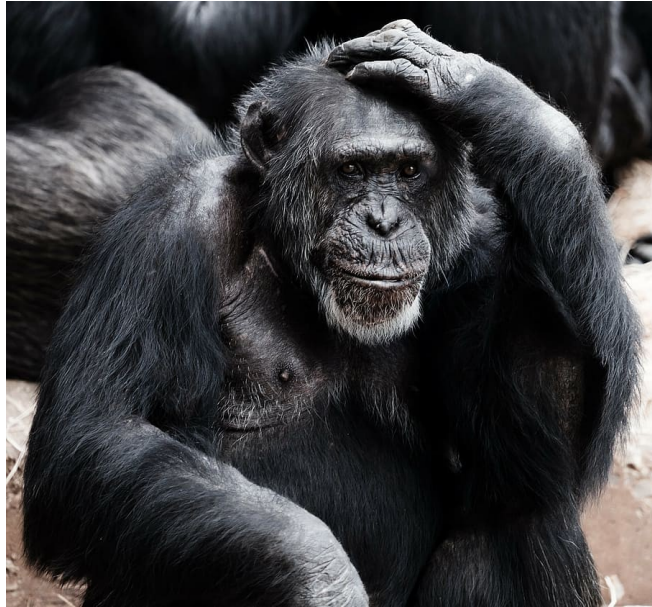
Just do whatever it takes to ensure that you keep doing exposures. And if you're too scared to try your original journey, you can always do it some other day.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Don't Second Guess Yourself



At any time during an exposure, you will feel one of the following. Total calm and confidence, a certain amount of nervousness, anxiety, or a panic attack. But as you get used to facing your fears, there's one more thing that can happen. You start to second guess yourself.

Second guessing is when your mind starts to wander, and you find yourself assuming that you might have anxiety or a panic attack. It's not that you feel particularly nervous, in fact, you may feel totally fine. But because you're so concerned about the possibility of getting anxious, you begin to pre-emptively imagine that you will. And then you start to plan accordingly, which usually means avoidance.

Don't let this happen. I've done it myself many times, and it's not good. If you're not anxious during a journey, then you have no reason to turn back. You should continue.

Whenever I second guessed myself during an exposure, I asked myself, why am I so concerned? The answer, which came to me instantly and instinctively, was that I was resisting change. I knew that I was engaging in avoidance. Not avoidance of fear, but of progress. It's fear of success.

I was avoiding experiencing a situation where I was very unlikely to become anxious. I think that when we second guess ourselves, it's because we can sense that we're making progress, and we don't know how to handle it, so we make up reasons to believe that we're more nervous than we really are. And we start to play the "what if?" game.

I've turned back home during exposures because of this, and I missed out on seeing myself handle situations well. You've got to break through this, and give yourself a chance to move

up a level. Yes you might panic, that's a possibility. But if you find yourself thinking up reasons why you might do so, the chances are you won't.

Do Easy Versions Of Difficult Journeys



Let's say you're about to do a long journey, or a journey involving multiple stages. You've planned it, and you know where you're going to go and how you're going to get there. But then at the last minute you realize that it's more challenging than you originally thought. You start to imagine yourself becoming anxious while doing it. Avoiding anxiety is never the best idea but sometimes it can be hard.

Here's what you can do. Break it down. If the journey involves a bus ride, then a walk, then a train journey, why not just get the bus, and then go back home. When you arrive at your destination walk around a bit and get comfortable. That way, the next time will be easier.

When you have another go, you can get the bus, then do the walk, and then make your way back. Again, take it easy and get comfortable wherever you end up.

And then finally you can do it again but this time take the train too. Now you're doing the entire journey as you planned. Each time, get comfortable at whatever stage you reach.

Here's another idea. You could do an easier, simpler version of the journey. For example you could make your way to the same destination, but take an easier route. Perhaps you could walk the entire way there and back, if walking would make you feel more in control.

Or you could go to a place that is similar to the destination, but much closer. For example, if you plan to go to a shopping mall 2 miles away, you could instead go to one that's half a mile away.

The idea is to build comfort and familiarity, and to take some of the pressure off, while maintaining a sense of accomplishment. This will give you the confidence to have another go, and keep progressing, until you're ready to do the original challenge.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Don't Be A Professional Victim



The problem with having agoraphobia is that it turns you into a coward. That's pretty much what it boils down to. But if you're going to be a coward, at least don't be a professional victim.

A professional victim is someone who prides themselves on having a problem. They love to label themselves because it means that they can hide behind the label and never actually do something about their problem.

The moment you say hey, come on, try to overcome your anxiety, they say oh no, I can't you see, because I'm a ...phobic, or I have [insert condition here], it's not that simple, etc.

If you have agoraphobia, I have sympathy for the fact that you're a coward. There's nothing wrong with having moments in which you just can't do something. Sometimes you just get too scared, I get it. That's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about here is when a person is determined to remain a coward and a victim.

I also understand that some people have it really bad and have other issues too. If you're one of those people, this isn't about you.

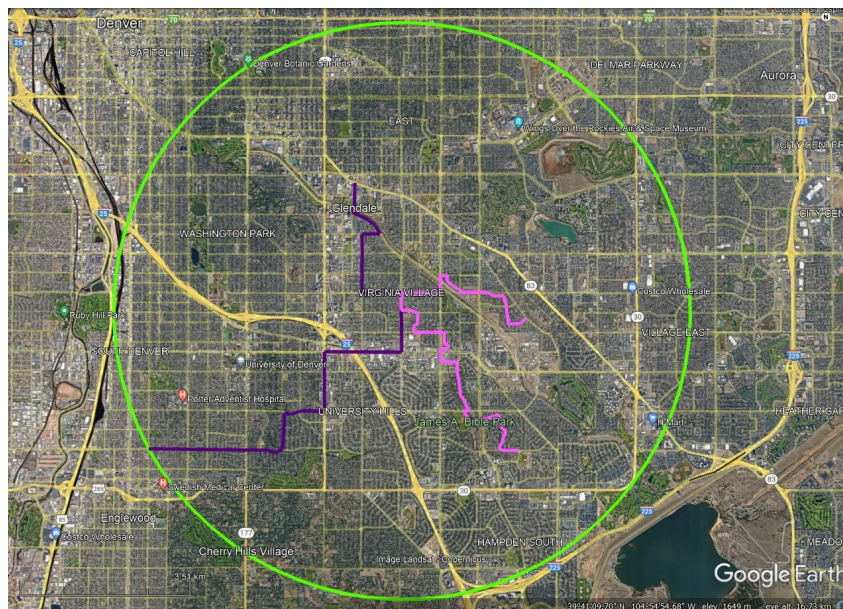
The problem is that these days people are too weak. So many people seem determined to remain downtrodden and not allow themselves to be helped. They have a self image of being a victim and they don't know any other other way, nor do they want to know.

If you're a professional victim, stop it. Don't you want to be able to go wherever you want and do whatever you want without anxiety? You don't have to be perfect. It's OK to be a coward at times and give into fear, but there's no need to take on the spirit of a coward.

Don't wallow in your problems. Don't act like you're some kind of special case that can't change. Toughen up and stop identifying with labels like agoraphobia sufferer. Stop looking for excuses.

If you want your self image to improve, and if you want to overcome agoraphobia, you've got to get off your ass and destroy your bad habit, and stop being a professional victim. And if that makes you cry I don't care. Deal with it. That's tough love. You're welcome.

Keep A Record Of Your Journeys



Morale is very important when doing exposures for overcoming agoraphobia. One way of building morale is to keep a visual record of your journeys on a map. I suggest Google Earth.

When I started my exposures, I used Google Earth to draw the routes that I covered. I drew lines on the map in pink to represent the routes that I walked. I used purple for routes that I did by bus, and blue for stretches of roads that I had covered both on foot and by bus. For train journeys, I drew brown lines.

To give a visual representation of how far from home I had walked, I drew a circle. In the middle was home, and the edge of the circle was the furthest point that I had walked to. To show how far I had traveled overall, I drew a green circle.

So at a glance, I could see how far from home I was able to travel, and by what means. This gave me the confidence to see that if, for example, I could travel 3 miles south east of where I live, then surely I could also travel the same distance in any other direction.

Not only that, but I could fill in a lot of gaps in between. So if for example I could go 5 miles out from home, there would be no reason not to be able to handle any journey within that radius in any direction.

I know it may be hard to visualize this, but the point I'm making is that when you can see what you've already done, it gives you the confidence to do more. If you can see a circle that goes out 7 miles from home, it becomes easier to picture yourself going a little bit further.

Another benefit of doing this is that when you look at the map and the lines that you've

drawn, you'll remember your journeys more easily, which means that you'll remember your successes.

Sometimes I used to look at the size of my circle and compare it with the size of some cities, and even small islands. It's a good feeling to know that even if you've only done journeys within a couple of miles from home, it's the equivalent of being able to travel all over a small city.

I strongly recommend that you download Google Earth and try this. You'll progress faster if you do.

Scale Down, Repeat And Stretch



Many people get demoralized when they think about how to make progress with exposures. They wonder how to start and how to deal with setbacks. And they get scared when considering the long journeys that they may find themselves having to face and how to handle them.

I'm about to tell you three things that you can do which no one and nothing in the world has the power to take from you : Your ability to scale down, repeat, and stretch.

Scaling down means starting small. If you're too scared to do long journeys, you should start with short ones. And I don't care how short. If walking a quarter of a mile down the street (which is about 5 minutes) is too much of a challenge, then why not do just a couple of blocks.

The issue that lots of people have is that they feel ashamed at doing something ridiculously small. But there's no need. Don't worry about it. Even if taking 10 paces down the street is where you have start, then just do it. No one is watching, no one cares. You've got enough on your plate as it is, so don't let pride be an unnecessary obstacle.

Repetition is your friend. You can get used to doing almost anything if you keep repeating it. Again, there's no need to be ashamed. If you have to walk to the supermarket 20 times before you can move on, then just get on with it. Do it until it's comfortable, even boring. When something is boring, that's a good sign. It means you're ready to tackle something a bit harder. In fact, you'll naturally want to move on, and that's great for your morale.

Who cares if you find yourself having to stay at the same level for a while. Just keep repeating those minor challenges, and progress at your own pace. If you have to do them

many times then so be it. It doesn't matter. Just do what needs to be done.

Stretching means gradually making your exposure journeys longer and more challenging. You'll be surprised how much you can achieve by slowly expanding your comfort zone. I have to add that expanding your comfort zone in itself is not the goal of exposure, but it is a natural part of the process, and it does help.

When I started, my first journey was a 10 minute walk. About 4 or 5 months later I was regularly going 5, 6 even 7 miles from home. I went to all kinds of places and saw many interesting things. At first I only did walking journeys, but soon enough I was on buses, and then trains. And all because I made a point of slowly stretching.

I'll say it again. Don't be ashamed to start small, don't worry about having to do journeys repeatedly for as long as it takes to get comfortable, and gradually stretch your boundaries.

Scale down, repeat, and stretch. At your own pace, without shame. Your progress will be more solid.

[Previous post](#)

[Back to contents](#)

[Next post](#)

Exposure Means Being Present In Your Environment



I remember when I used to do exposures every single day. I made a lot of progress and I was always pleasantly surprised at how far I could go. When you do something very often, it very quickly builds momentum. You find yourself able to do all kinds of things that not so long ago would have been quite hard.

However, my journeys always involved a lot of walking. And after a while, one street becomes no different to any other street. Every journey starts to feel like another version of the more or less the same journey. In other words it all starts to become very similar and you start to feel detached from the places that you end up in.

Exposure means putting yourself in a situation, and opening yourself to whatever might happen. But when every journey feels the same, that doesn't help you much. It's important to feel present. This is why you should make sure you interact with your surroundings. When you do this, it makes the experience more real.

I've walked around many places not really feeling present, and that made me feel like I was somehow protecting myself. This is why I made the decision to do things such as lean against a wall, sit down for a few moments, touch a tree, pause and breathe the fresh air in a park, anything to highlight my presence.

I also would stop people and ask them for directions (even though I didn't need them). This is another kind of interaction with your environment. I would go into shops even just to browse, and sometimes I'd just stop where I was and look around, really appreciating my surroundings.

Being mindful of where you are highlights your exposure. It makes the experience of being

in a place more real. When you arrive at a destination, and even on the way there, you've got to truly be there, and make the place yours.

Every exposure ought to be meaningful. You should feel the experience fully, that way you're truly challenging yourself.

Reader's Question : Fear Of Traveling Abroad



Q : I had a traumatic episode on holiday overseas 4 years ago. Now the thought of an overseas holiday, or even someone mentioning it gives me the fear big time. I have to fly to Thailand in a few months and I'm dreading it. I have benzos to take but would rather not.

A : What was the traumatic event? Was it in Thailand, if not, where? Make a list of words, phrases and references that remind you of the event, and of the place where it happened, and make a list of things associated with air travel and holidays. Also go online and collect images to do with all of that.

Now repeat all of those words and phrases repeatedly, and often. And look at the images. Do this until you're totally bored. Think about it often. Do it until it all becomes meaningless and you no longer have any emotional response to any of it.

Do you live near an airport? If so, go there, and hang around for an hour or two. Do this as often as you feel the need to, and yes, do it until you don't care any more. If you don't live near an airport or can't get to one easily, then do this with a similar environment like a bus station or a large train station. Somewhere that might remind you of an airport. Go on websites and watch videos to do with travel, airports, airlines, etc.

Think about the event that happened. Play it in your mind over and over. If it was really bad, then make up a less bad version of it. Do whatever it takes to desensitize yourself as much as possible.

You have a few months to work on this. That's plenty of time to do this kind of repetitive

exposure. I know it's not the same as going to Thailand, but it's the next best thing.

When the time to go to Thailand is near, make sure you're as prepared as possible, so that hopefully you won't be doing any last minute rushing around. If possible, and if you haven't done so already by this time, go to the airport and get used to being there. Maybe a week or two before you have to leave.

If you get anxious, panic, cry, feel sick, or whatever, endure it. Stand your ground and rebel against your mind, which is telling you that you're in danger. You're not. Be a fighter and don't let your brain push you around. You can do it and you want to do it.

I know it's hard but you have to be brave.

Anxiety Is Like The Weather



Imagine walking down the street on a gloomy day. You look up and all you see is grey clouds and very little light, and it's cold. But no matter what the sky looks like, it's always the same behind the scenes. The sun is always there and it's always shining, and above the clouds the sky is always light blue.

But that's no good if you can't see beyond the grey clouds directly above you. However once the clouds move, suddenly you can see that sun and things start to look and feel better. As the sky changes, you can see blue and you can start to feel some warmth. Before you know it, you've got a spring in your step.

It's the same with anxiety.

How long does anxiety last? How long does a panic attack really last? Maybe not that long. Next time you have anxiety or a panic attack, count the seconds.

The weather can change from overcast and dreary to bright and pleasant in a matter of moments. And so can the way you feel. So why worry about a bit of anxiety when in next to no time you could be feeling OK?

Think about it. You're letting your life be ruled by a silly habit that is based on how you feel or how you think you'll feel during a few seconds. Think about how much you've already missed out on because of that. And think of everything that you want to do in life that you won't get to do if you continue this way.

Add up the total amount of time that you've ever spent panicking, having anxiety, or just worrying or being nervous. How does that compare to what you're missing out on in life? Is it worth it? Can you not endure a few seconds of discomfort here and there if it means

being able to go places and do things? Is missing out on a more fulfilling life a fair price to pay for avoiding a brief moment of discomfort once in a while?

Next time you're out and about and you start to get anxious, rather than making a big deal out of it, just remind yourself that in 5, maybe 10, maybe 20 seconds you could be absolutely fine again.

Anxiety is like the weather. Easy come, easy go. Get some perspective and just ride it like a wave. And don't let it rule your life.

[Previous](#)

[Back to contents](#)

Agoraphobia Exposure

Guidance And Encouragement To Beat Agoraphobia One On One Exposure Coaching

The most effective way to overcome agoraphobia is to put yourself into potentially anxious situations.

By repeatedly experiencing anxiety or at least the risk of anxiety, you take away its power, reducing it to no more than a mild, occasional annoyance that you can easily handle.

But it's not always easy. For some, it can be so scary that they wouldn't dare to try it, unless they had encouragement, support and guidance. There's nothing wrong with that, everyone is different.

And that's what I'm offering to you if you're one of those people. I will give you the guidance and encouragement that you need, if you'll let me.

To find out more, click [HERE](#).

Agoraphobia Exposure

[Blog](#)
[Forum](#)
[Reader's Questions](#)

[Guest Post](#)
[Coaching](#)
[Subscribers](#)