Scary Stuff

Fears can be irrational (and impractical), but the shivers and racing heartbeat you feel are for real.

December 12, 2011 By Lauren Tuck

Whether fear of heights keeps your feet firmly planted on the ground or a terror of venomous snakes stops you from booking that dream trip to Africa, you can overcome the fright that's been holding you back.

Fear is a deep-seated emotion that's linked to your body's instinctual response to potential danger. For example, if you're afraid of spiders, the sight of this eight-legged insect inching toward you will set off a chain reaction. This starts when the brain releases chemicals that trigger a fight-or-flight response. The result? Quickened heartbeat and breathing and other physical reactions that prepare you to defend yourself or flee.

But how do you curb fear? That's simple. First, recognize the feeling. Then, embrace it. Make a conscious effort to confront your fear. For example, if you don't like crowds, take a trip to the mall. If talking to strangers makes your palms sweat, go to a party alone. Remember to ask yourself, What's the worst that can happen? Start with easy challenges then progress to more difficult ones.

And if you overdo it? Then take a moment to do some easy breathing exercises to help alleviate your anxiety.

What's important is to overcome your fear before it transforms into a phobia that threatens your quality of life.

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