

Fear of Flying? Get Real (Time)

You may be able to rid yourself of your fear of flying by virtually facing it.

The **California School of Professional Psychology** in San Diego is one of four sites in the nation utilizing a virtual reality system to treat the phobia.

"The program combines real-time physiological monitoring with virtual reality graded exposure therapy," said Brenda Wiederhold, director of the school's new Center for Advanced Multimedia Psychotherapy. "It takes about eight sessions to get people to the point where they feel comfortable about flying — sometimes fewer."

The system uses a head-mounted display that immerses you in a simulation of the complete flight experience. Wearing the helmet, you are guided through everything from sitting on the aircraft with engines off to taxiing to landing.

Wiederhold said several of her clients are business executives being held back in their careers by the phobia.

She said one particular client was so wrought with fear that when he put on the helmet he broke down and cried.

"We couldn't even turn the engines on," Wiederhold said. "Within a few weeks he was virtually traveling through thunderstorms and turbulence and was able to do multiple takeoffs and landings."

The center is making plans to launch virtual reality programs to address fear of heights and fear of driving.

— Nevada Smith



USING VIRTUAL REALITY TO CONQUER YOUR
FEAR OF FLYING CAN HAVE SIDE EFFECTS