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Passengers overcome fear of flying

Moist palms, rapid heartbeat, sweating, nausea, panic attacks. If you experience these symptoms when flying, you're certainly not alone. Aviation experts reckon that one person in three suffers from a fear of flying or experiences high stress levels in a plane. But the good news is that you can do something about it. Fit to fly seminars can help to get you back in the air. In Switzerland, they are run by Swiss Aviation Training, a subsidiary of Switzerland's national airline Swiss. Vincent Landon reports:

By [Vincent Landon](#), World Radio Switzerland



Nick Brown is a legal recruitment consultant in London.

BROWN: "For many years, probably for as much as 20 years, I just simply couldn't fly anywhere. I often used to holiday in Italy and Switzerland and I would end up driving there rather than actually taking the plane. In many cases, I had actually booked the flight and as it got nearer to the time, I would get increasingly stressed and I would start having nightmares about being in plane crashes. It was very, very vivid."

For 20 years, Nick cancelled his flights at the last minute. He finally decided enough was enough and to conquer his fear, booked himself on a flight to New Zealand. Well, he managed to survive and – apart from the odd relapse - has never looked back.

BROWN: "I wouldn't say that I actually enjoy it - not by any means. But I can cope with it. I don't have those nerves beforehand. So I count myself very lucky to have conquered that really."

In a survey in Germany in 2003, 16 per cent of those asked, expressed a fear of flying while another 22 per cent said they felt uneasy in the air. This confirms earlier studies in the United States. To help people like Nick, Swiss Aviation Training offers Fit to Fly seminars. Psychologist and flight attendant, Thomas Wey, leads the courses. He says the fear of flying includes several elements.

WEY: "If it's the height; if it's the start, the landing; if it's the turbulence; if it's not being able to look out of the window; if it's just the mass of people in

this tiny space, or not having control over the situation. That's quite a common thing."

Over a weekend, the small groups of between six and 12 people learn how a plane flies and visit an aircraft on the ground. They are taught relaxation techniques and given information about air travel and its safety. First Officer Christoph Ammann, a pilot with Swiss, says people think plane crashes are more common than they actually are.

AMMANN: "If you look at statistics flying is safe. Definitely. But fears do not respond to facts and figures all the time."

The weekend culminates in a return flight to a European city. For some this is a major undertaking. Jeroen Zimmermann is a category manager with Migros. He booked himself on a course in October.

ZIMMERMANN: "My fear of flying began five years ago. It was connected to the birth of my son and the start of a family. My heart started thumping. I broke into a sweat, I couldn't sleep and during the flight, I was completely distracted."

In the past, Zimmermann had flown two or three times a year for work and pleasure. He had always enjoyed flying but now he tried to avoid it whenever possible. When he heard about the courses, he signed up. And, he says, it worked for him.

ZIMMERMANN: "Three weeks later I flew to Asia on business. I could read a newspaper and watch a movie. I wasn't just thinking about the plane. The flight was certainly more relaxed."

Course organisers say nine out of ten participants go on to board an aircraft afterwards – perhaps uneasily but none with panic attacks. Courses are held every month. The next is on the last weekend in April.