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KARIN MCCAY'S

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3/15/04

Virtual Reality Used to Conquer Fears

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It's called virtual reality therapy, and it's helping hundreds of people conquer everything from a fear of flying to spiders to everyday anxiety. It's the newest thing at San Diego Hospital where researchers are using heart and breathing monitors to help people learn how to control their anxiety while doing what they fear most.



"We do fear of flying, public speaking, heights, driving, claustrophobia, panic disorder, agoraphobia phobia, fear of spiders. That covers it. So, we show you on the screen what your breathing looks like, we teach you how to control that. We teach you to control your thought processes, and then when you're ready with those coping mechanisms, we put you in the virtual reality world and have you practice these mechanisms," explains Dr. Brenda Wiederhold, virtual reality therapist.

Virtual programs for eating disorders, weight loss, ADHD, and autism are expected to be up and running by this summer. And because this is considered standard cognitive behavioral therapy, most medical insurance companies cover it.

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