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VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY HELPS OVERCOME ACROPHOBIA

 HEALTH & WELLBEING

VR therapy programme aims to reduce the fear of heights with computer-generated virtual coach.

Utilising the way people think is one of the most astonishing ways in which technology can function. From blockchain technology tackling [extremist views](#) to children learning about anti-discrimination via an [online soccer game](#), its use is seemingly endless.

Researchers from University of Oxford spinout [Oxford VR](#) have optimised virtual reality to help those with a fear of heights overcome their phobia. The team has developed a VR programme in which psychological therapy is delivered by a computer-generated virtual coach. Users receive personalised treatment, therefore being able to interact with the virtual coach using voice recognition technology. A random selection of one hundred people with a fear of heights received either the VR therapy or no treatment. Participants had, on average, lived with a fear of heights for 30 years. Those who received the therapy spent an average of two hours in VR over five treatment sessions. All participants in the VR group showed a reduction in fear of heights, with the average reduction being 68 percent. Furthermore, half of the participants in the VR group had a reduction in fear of heights by over three quarters.

The study, published in [The Lancet](#), concludes that psychological therapy delivered automatically by a VR coach can produce large clinical benefits. It also predicted the future potential for a variety of other mental health disorders.

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Email: contact@oxfordvr.org
Website: www.oxfordvr.org
Contact: www.oxfordvr.org/connect