

## **Claustrophobia and how to overcome it**

Claustrophobia, the fear of small spaces, affects around 10% of the UK population. The anxiety about becoming trapped in lifts, trains, tunnels, crowds, public toilets and many other places can be painfully debilitating. Claustrophobic panic floods the body with stress '*fight or flight*' hormones, often causing intense physical and emotional distress, and making it difficult for the person to think rationally.

Some try to ignore their fear and press on, but others, understandably, actively avoid claustrophobic situations. Unfortunately, this leads to restricted freedom of movement and reduction in confidence. Claustrophobia can even prevent people from accessing medical services like conventional MRI scanners: they fear the experience of lying flat in a tightly confined space. Hitachi developed the patient friendly Oasis Open MRI system in recognition of this concern.

Claustrophobia can be overcome through self-help techniques and/or therapy. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to recovery. Individuals can choose to learn to soothe their anxiety, building their capacity for self-care and resilience: to have help in re-establishing confidence, if the phobia was caused by trauma: or learn cognitive techniques to challenge their belief that they won't be able to cope in a small space. Many find a combination approach most effective, prioritising their ability to make choices and take control of the process.

For claustrophobia sufferers, there can indeed be light at the end of the tunnel.

Andrea Perry 2010 (author of *Claustrophobia: Finding Your Way Out - hope and help for people who fear and avoid confined spaces* Worth Publishing 2008) [www.andreaperry.co.uk](http://www.andreaperry.co.uk)