

Using virtual reality to treat social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders

Researchers have been developing virtual reality systems that help people overcome specific phobias since the 1990s. VR therapy has since expanded to address more complex anxiety disorders, such as social anxiety and post-traumatic stress, and even the anxiety associated with paranoid schizophrenia.

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[C]onfronting fears can be easier in a virtual setting. A flight-phobic patient can take off and land many times in a single VR session without the cost and hassle of actual flights. Veterans with post-traumatic stress who can't remember a traumatic memory in great detail can reenact a close proxy in VR for a more potent therapeutic experience. The same goes for those who repress painful memories.

Until recently, the price and complexity of VR equipment, which could run tens of thousands of dollars, limited VR therapy to a few research labs and clinics. Now, there are computer-based headsets like the Oculus Rift that cost only a few hundred dollars, as well headsets such as the Samsung Gear VR that turn smartphones into virtual reality displays for about 100 bucks.

With cheaper, more user-friendly systems poised to make virtual reality therapy available to many more patients, researchers are testing the bounds of VR's therapeutic powers to treat a broader range of disorders or, in some cases, replace the therapist altogether.

Read full, original post: [Virtual reality therapy has real-life benefits for some mental disorders](#)