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YOUR HEAD**

» **HIKE WITH
BLISTERS**

» **GET YOUR DREAM
TRIP FUNDED**

» **LOVE THE RAIN**

» **FAIL LIKE A PRO**

» **BEAT ALTITUDE
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THE
MENTAL
GAME

under the eyes, under the nose, chin, collarbone, elbows, and wrists. Crazy, my mood went from charged up, antsy, and anxious to calmer and more confident. The more I tapped, the better I felt about the thought of climbing. Sure, I was sitting inside, on a level floor, but I experienced the tiniest flicker of hope that I might be able to approach an exposed ridge and scramble up it.

WAS I CURED? Only one way to find out.

On a hot August afternoon, I set out for Blob Rock, a crag outside of Boulder. With the help of two expert climbers, I intended to rappel down to a tiny ledge in the middle of a 400-foot-high rock face. Once there, I'd be clipped to an anchor for safety and left on my own for an hour. If my quick-fix treatments had worked, I'd know soon enough.

I had Adams's words ringing in my ears that brainspotting might have worked in one session. But I hedged just in case, tapping a few meridians before getting out of the car. I then hiked to the top of Blob Rock and clipped in to a rope. On the walk to the edge, I felt all the normal stuff: clenched neck, speeding pulse, taste of metal. But maybe—just maybe—it was a little less intense, because I didn't want to run away. Instead I turned around, leaned away from the cliff, and slowly lowered myself (on belay) to the 4-foot-wide ledge. I was surprisingly calm in motion, and stayed calm while I waited for one of the climber-helpers to lower down and secure me to the anchor. When he left, for a few short minutes I remained at ease.

But fear operates on its own schedule. I looked across the canyon and saw two climbers on another route. The horizontal distance somehow tweaked the vertical distance below me and my equilibrium went terribly out of whack. My head started to spin, so I took a deep breath and tried tapping: "Even though I have a fear of heights, I love and accept myself unconditionally." I forced my eyes into their resource spot, but looking up made me feel worse, and I knew brainspotting wasn't the miracle I was hoping for. And then I realized I wasn't holding on to anything.

I felt like Wile E. Coyote after running off a cartoon cliff, suspended in midair with a split second to contemplate my fate.

When I looked at the slings securing me to the anchor, it was with different eyes. There was no way they'd hold. My limbs went limp. Suddenly, I could see myself slipping off the ledge, cartwheeling through space.

I survived an hour on the ledge, but it didn't feel like a victory. My anxiety red-lined and stayed there, and I realized that I could check another fast-fix method off my list. It's called flooding, and can be thought of as "the just-suck-it-up-and-get-over-it treatment."

There are two schools of thought when it comes to facing your fear head-on. The slow lane, called desensitization, and the fast lane, flooding. (Slow: Show a person who is terrified of snakes a picture of a snake. Fast: Throw him into a snake pit.) Kerr, the fear expert, says the scientific community supports desensitization while it is split on the benefits of flooding.

I knew which side I was on after an hour on that ledge. Instead of flooding or brainspotting or tapping my way to happiness, I clenched my quads so hard throughout the ordeal that they were sore for days.

[MY BIGGEST FEAR]

FALLING TREES

» People think I'm crazy, but one of my biggest fears is having a tree fall on me while I'm hiking, mountain biking, or floating.

—Tom Yahl, reader

A YEAR WENT BY. Life, work, and being a mom to a newborn all crowded out my quest, but that makes sense given my fear is strictly recreational. Ignoring this fear came at little cost to my regular life. But another year meant my fear was another year closer to being permanent. At least the break might work in my favor, I hoped, imagining new advances in the field.

The most cutting-edge lab-based fear research being done today is with virtual reality. In essence, VR lets facilitators bring the fear indoors and carefully customize your exposure to it. It's desensitization with complete control.

One September day, I drove to the University of Utah's acrophobia-specific VR lab to meet with lead researcher Jeanine Stefanucci. Stefanucci and her team were

LOVE THE RAIN

See beauty in hardship.

Thunder wars with lightning in the distance while wind relentlessly shoots a thousand raindrops against my skin. I just turned nine years old but can't help wailing like a toddler. My seven-year-old brother whimpers in my father's arms. We're on the Artists Paintpots Trail in Yellowstone National Park, but we've forgotten all about the geothermal wonders we've come to see. Instead of hiking, the three of us cower beneath the fattest lodgepole pine we can find.

There's a fourth member of our family, but she's not joining us under the tree. My mother stands in the middle of the trail, exposed to the elements, beckoning for us to join her, to stand our ground instead of hiding. Her hood is down, flapping in the wind like a cape. Behind her, wisps of white smoke escape from a fumarole.

"Isn't this fun?" Her voice is the melodic line against the beat of the rain.

The more the three of us struggle, the more my mother seems to relax. Rain sorts the ends of her hair into rivers. She closes her eyes, leans back, and tries to catch it all on her tongue.

"Look," she points at the sky, rippling like liquid silver. "It's so beautiful."

Twelve years later, heavy rain beats me to my knees on the shore of Trout Lake in Glacier National Park. I should feel fear like I did in Yellowstone; instead, I'm my mother standing her ground. Cancer claimed her just a month earlier, after we hiked nearly 50 national parks together. And beneath that blackest sky, inside my collapsed tent, I finally realize what she was trying to teach me all those years ago: You can't control out-of-control things.

Years later, after becoming a mother, I finally appreciated how rain forces you into the present moment, a gift we lose as we outgrow childhood. This is what I love most about rain: the pitter-patter that drowns out the past and the future.

—Leslie Hsu Oh



Tips for a Rainy Day

1. Dress the part. Wear waterproof jackets with hoods, rain pants and gaiters. Use venting to keep from overheating. Change socks frequently.

2. Camp wisely. Select a slightly slanted campsite with a clear path for runoff. If you set up your tent in the rain, wipe down the interior with a pack towel or bandana until dry-ish.

3. Find the magic. Rain softens and blurs a scene in a way that makes even familiar places look different. Take a cue from what kids enjoy in the rain.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Distances always seem longer at the end of the day, but don't get overwhelmed. Break the mileage down into tiny chunks. Maybe you don't think you can hike another 5 miles today, but surely you can hike another 10 feet. And another.

