

Anxious driver? There are ways to ease your stress

September 9 2023, by Cara Murez



It's not unusual to experience driving anxiety. Living in cities with heavy

traffic, five-lane highways and little public transportation can make it even harder.

A psychologist offers some suggestions for easing those fears.

"One of the biggest challenges centers around anxiety related to the trigger, and that can be exacerbated by a variety of things like weather, [traffic](#) or concerns about [road](#) rage," said Dr. Eric Storch, vice chair of psychology in the department of psychiatry and [behavioral sciences](#) at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Someone experiencing driving anxiety might feel distress. Another common symptom is avoidance.

When anxiety is extreme, that might mean not driving at all, getting rides from others or using ride-share apps like Uber.

Someone may only drive when others are present or under certain conditions, such as during the day or not on highways.

However, these options are just not practical for many and might cause greater anxiety and avoidance over time, Storch said.

It's crucial that someone learns how to confront driving fears gradually and progressively.

Start driving on backroads, then move to non-highway roads. Then drive those same roads during high-traffic times.

Over time, step it up to more traffic situations.

If you fear driving on big bridges, start by driving on small bridges and then drive on larger bridges.

"The whole time, you're reflecting on being in that moment and emphasizing what you learned after confronting the feared [trigger](#) of driving, which is that you can handle it, the feared outcome typically does not occur and that [anxiety](#) decreases the more you confront it," Storch said in a Baylor news release.

If your concern is road rage, try to be courteous when others are acting up. If someone targets you with rage, it can be helpful to avoid engagement.

"Have a good cognitive sense—buying into someone else's rage doesn't get you any further," Storch said.

Storch offers some suggestions for calming nerves in anxious drivers who encounter people with road rage.

Give people the benefit of the doubt. You do not know what is going on in their life. Forgive others for the mistakes they make, giving yourself the opportunity to let it go, he said.

Remember that your goal is to get from point A to point B, and getting in a road rage incident will work against that. Take deep breaths to calm yourself.

"The reality is it is difficult to drive... on busy roads, especially during traffic. But avoiding those things doesn't help you accomplish what you need to in life," Storch said. "If you're anxious about something, it's all about taking [small steps](#) toward confronting it and learning what happens as you confront it."

More information: The Anxiety & Depression Association of America has more on [driving anxiety](#).

Copyright © 2023 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Anxious driver? There are ways to ease your stress (2023, September 9) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-anxious-driver-ways-ease-stress.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.