

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Got a spider phobia? Drop the fear with Feardrop

If you've got an aversion to spiders, then UTAS needs you and your phobia for a research study.

UTAS Psychology and Medicine researchers are looking for volunteers to participate in a research study and receive a free trial treatment for spider phobia.

Feardrop is an online phobia treatment system developed by UTAS academics Professor Ken Kirkby, Dr Allison Matthews and Dr Joel Scanlan. It is understood to be the first program to directly deliver exposure treatment online.

Approximately 5-10 per cent of the adult population experience some form of specific phobia, with higher rates found among females than males.

When people are confronted by the feared object or situation they feel extremely anxious and some people may experience a panic attack. This can have significant unwanted effects on their everyday life.

The current research trial is being conducted by Monica Poziemski, an Honours student in the School of Medicine.

Ms Poziemski said unfortunately many people with phobias do not seek treatment due to accessibility, cost and duration, which is why online treatment could be a helpful solution.

"Feardrop is designed to help people overcome their fears through a common psychological technique known as graded exposure," she said.

"The goal of exposure therapy is to expose the individual to the feared object gradually until they experience a reduction in fear through the process of habituation."

In the treatment, participants will rate their level of anxiety at several stages while they look at stationary or moving images of spiders on the computer screen. Participants learn to look at the pictures until their anxiety level is low, at which time they will move onto the next stage.

Ms Poziemski said the online treatment helps people to reduce their fear of spiders in everyday life and may act as a stepping stone for real life exposure.

“We are conducting this research trial to assess the effectiveness of the treatment and to work out the best way to present the images to achieve the maximum benefit for our participants.

“It is also hoped that the treatment will be a useful aid for therapists to use as part of traditional face-to-face treatments,” she said.

In the future, the team plans to develop online treatments for other types of phobias including birds, cats, frogs and rodents.

To participate in the study: Volunteers who are interested in participating can register online at www.feardrop.com to begin the trial treatment or email contact@feardrop.com

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