

Acrophobia



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Anne's story

I can remember exactly when I first experienced acrophobia. I had taken my daughter to the ballet at Sadler's Wells (pre-refurbishment) and had booked my favourite seats – first row dress circle. What I hadn't bargained for was the steepness of the tiering. I sat down and couldn't move for fear that I would topple over the balcony! Although I knew intellectually that this was totally improbable, I couldn't stop the feelings. I kept telling Olivia not to move either and she looked at me as though I had gone mad.

That day marked a turning point. I went from someone who loved high and scary fairground rides to someone who was often found riveted to the spot unable to move forward for fear of heights. At these times my insides felt as though they were going to fall out – not a very pleasant feeling. On a chair lift to the Needles on the Isle of Wight I was convinced my daughter would slip out of the belt on the seat and I wouldn't be able to stop her. High balconies on holiday were a misery and sight-seeing was often curtailed. Going down a steep escalator on the underground was a torment. And I became increasingly worried about falling down stairs.

Over the next few years my acrophobia seemed to increase in severity. The Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame left me clinging to walls. Most often a little hand (growing bigger each year) guided me to safety. The problem came to a head when a friend booked theatre tickets and the seats were in the upper circle. If someone had placed a million pounds in front of me I would not have been able to bend forward to pick up the money for fear of toppling over the seats. My friend kept making silly comments which didn't help and at the interval I was only able to leave my seat when a kind man, seeing my terror, reached out and held me as I made my way along the row. I didn't go back to the seat for the second act.

Acrophobia isn't a debilitating disease, but it was having a major effect on my social life. I decided the time had come to contact one of the experts on *Health and Homeopathy*. As it happened Dr Keith Souter and I were on line at the same time and we corresponded by email about the problem. Keith suggested Lac felinum which appealed to me because of my love of cats – we have four!

Keith advised taking one 30c Lac felinum half an hour before going into a theatre (or anywhere where I had problems) and then taking one as and when

Anne Coates describes her fear of heights and Keith Souter explains how Lac felinum can help

Acrophobia, fear of heights, belongs to the group of disorders known as the specific phobias. The word is derived from the Greek *akros*, meaning "high" and *phobos*, meaning "fear". The thing about specific phobias is that although they can cause considerable anxiety or phobic fear, they can usually be incorporated into one's life. In other words, the anxiety only comes on when faced with the situation, so if one can avoid putting oneself in that situation, then it need not pose a great problem.

In fact, this is generally how people deal with their phobias. They avoid situations and live around them. Unfortunately, these specific fears often impinge upon one's social life and if one is to continue to avoid the situations which pro-

voke the fear, then a diminishing social life is usually the consequence. The good thing, however, is that the more specific the phobia, the easier it is to treat, either with some form of behavioural therapy or with homeopathy.

In homeopathy it is important to listen to the individual's experience of a problem. Many people often mistakenly use the term vertigo to describe their fear of heights. This is understandable, since the problem they experience is often provoked by heights. Yet vertigo is a very specific spinning sensation which makes the individual feel that they are actually moving. Since it may be provoked by looking down from a height, it is perceived to be one and the same thing as a fear of heights. This is not actually the case.

needed throughout the performance.

I tried it out when we went to see *The Sound of Music* which my daughter and her friends were desperate to see. I remembered to take the Lac felinum before going into the theatre and I had to take it several times during the performance. In fact the friend sitting next to me commented on how often I'd taken it. But to me it was working as I'd managed to stay in my seat.

Having used remedies for my daughter with great success (especially Cocculus for travel sickness), I knew that I would need to take fewer doses of Lac felinum as time went on. However, there were times when I forgot to take it before going into a situation when I would need it. This happened at a Proms concert and when some late-comers meant I had to stand to let them pass, I had great difficulty sitting down again.

However a few weeks later I went to the theatre with the same friend who was amazed at how much better I was. The play we went to see was *All About My Mother* and I was so impressed I wanted my daughter to see it. The Old Vic offers resident tickets at a very reduced price – the problem is that the seats are most often in the gods. I bought these tickets and Olivia couldn't believe that I was actually sitting there in such a relaxed way.

My acrophobia is so much better now. In fact I rarely take the remedy (often I forget!) and although I might feel a bit wobbly now and again it is nothing compared to the horrible feelings I once had.

On a recent press trip to Switzerland, I was surprised that each of the other three journalists suffered in some degree with acrophobia. We were very high up in the mountains and had to cross a bridge over an extremely deep ravine. I actually managed to peer over the wall, having taken one Lac felinum before leaving the hotel. That was the only time I took the remedy throughout the trip. On our second day the weather was very bad and as we were descending the mountain, our cable car came to an abrupt stop, swinging in mid-air. I heard the ski instructor swear under his breath and watched him turn white, while the other woman in our party turned green. I felt the most amazing sense of calm and peace – and no symptoms of acrophobia at all.

Two main keynotes

There are two main keynote features in Anne's case. First of all is the realisation that this is purely a fear of heights. There

is no mention of a spinning sensation, no actual vertigo. Very specifically, the fear is that she could topple over the balcony. Although she could rationalise it and understand that there would be no way that this could happen, yet the fear was so intense that she would be rooted the spot.

This is typical of Lac felinum. There is usually a fear of falling downstairs, yet *without* vertigo.

The second main feature is this sensation that the insides could fall out. Once again, this is utterly classic for Lac felinum. Sepia also has this dragging down sensation, yet does not generally have the fear of heights.

Picture the kitten

The picture of the fire brigade being called out to rescue a kitten from the top of a tree is almost a cliché. The kitten has no trouble getting up there, yet seems rooted with fear to the branch. No amount of coaxing seems to help. Yet logically, cats are climbers. It will not fall, it will eventually climb down. It is a question of self-belief. You do not, after all, find cat skeletons in trees.

The Milk remedies

The Lacs (the Milk remedies) have certain themes in common. Milk is the food used to nurture all young animals. This indicates their use in situations in people's lives which revolve around issues of dependence and independence. And about bonding between parents and child. Each of the milk remedies will manifest this in a particular way.

Lac felinum is very useful for fear of heights as illustrated beautifully in this case. Another remedy often thought of for fear of heights is Argent nitricum, yet the type of fear is very different. Instead of fearing that one will fall, as



Anne's cat Alice feeding her kittens

Photo courtesy of Anne Coates

is the case with Lac felinum, Argent nitricum is associated with a fear of having a lemming impulse.

Lac felinum is often useful for graceful, neat people. They may be perfectionists and dislike mistakes. They can be curious, yet soon after may be indifferent as well. All of these are cat attributes.

From time to time someone in need of Lac felinum may get down in the dumps. They can be cross, they might even metaphorically hiss at others.

Their eyes are very important to them and they do not like things too close. They may be very protective of their eyes and be aware of tiredness, prickling sensations and eyestrain. And when they have eye symptoms they may end up with headaches.

You can never predict how a cat will react. They expect to have their food set before them, yet when it is produced they walk away. Sometimes they will ignore their owner, at other times they will crave attention. This alternation of symptoms is a common feature when Lac felinum is needed. They can be hot or cold and chilly. They can be heavy limbed, or sprightly.

When indicated Lac felinum often produces an excellent response, a feeling that the contented cat has had its milk.



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