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## Health

# Fear fighter 'extinguishes anxiety'



The device has been licensed in the US for some time

A Walkman-like device that could defeat fear by passing electricity through the brain and re-tuning cells is going on sale in the UK.

The compact machine could help people who suffer severe stress and anxiety over things such as exams, interviews or flying.

The manufacturers say it can also help people suffering from insomnia or depression.

Trials have so far shown that it produces at least a 25% improvement in up to 80% to 90% of patients with such conditions.

### Psychological baggage

The Alpha-Stim is based on a prototype built by American neurobiologist Dr Daniel Kirsch 17 years ago.



The modern version is more compact than the original

Once switched on, it passes a current through the brain for 20 minutes to an hour, depending on the setting. After continued use it can be switched on for shorter periods.

However, while Dr Kirsch's device was the size of a suitcase, its modern-day counterpart can fit in the palm of the hand.

It is described as a "cranial electrotherapy stimulator", and comes in a slim blue and white plastic container. Two electrodes clip on to the earlobes.

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The Alpha-Stim is licensed by the Food and Drug Administration in the US as a medical treatment.

### 'Fashion accessory'

Nick O'Hare is managing director of the London-based medical equipment company Osbon Medical, which will distribute the Alpha-Stim in the UK.

"At first glance it looks just like a personal stereo," he said. "You can slip it in your handbag or clip it on to a belt. It's not necessarily meant for people with extreme problems, although it will help them too.

"It's for anybody or everybody who wants to feel less of a stress victim.

"You can put it on at breakfast every day before going to work, or whenever you need it. The effect is hard to describe - you feel sort of lightheaded and 'cleaner'. It gives you clarity and makes your thoughts more organised."

He said he used the Alpha-Stim to overcome claustrophobic panic attacks on the London Underground, while his wife uses it to overcome her fear of flying.

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