

Take a leaf out of Keala Kennelly's book and overcome your fears to surf hard.



# F.E.A.R

How to break through fear and keep surfing.

WORDS HAYLEY LAWENCE

As surfers, we've all been in a situation where a wipeout has left us humbled by the ocean and scared of the mighty power of the waves. Whether you're climbing your leash on an urchin covered reef, or being tossed around in shallow whitewater, it can, frankly, be scary to be at the mercy of the waves.

Whether your fear is triggered by wipeouts, big waves, crowds, surfing solo or surfing a new break, it can be debilitating to your surfing. Once the fear sets in it can be difficult to overcome – paralysing your take offs, fuelling hesitation and panic, and even stopping you paddling out as you doubt your ability from the shore.

So what can you do when fear stalls your surfing?

### 1: Accept fear.

It's natural to feel fear, so don't fight it. Fear is what keeps us safe and aware, and every surfer feels fear at different levels. The first part of overcoming it is acknowledge it, and to accept that it's ok.

### 2: Press pause.

If you're frustrated and worried every time you hit the water, focussing on it and pushing yourself can amplify your fear. Try taking a break from surfing – a day or two if you're on a surfing holiday, or a couple of weeks if you're at home and surf regularly – and focus your attention on something different. Trust that it's okay to step back from the challenge for a moment. Then come back to it in a more relaxed frame of mind.

### 3: Reconnect

Ditch your surfboard and reconnect with the playfulness of the ocean. Whether you go bodysurfing, bellyboarding, or take a longboard out in little peelers, just hit the ocean with the aim of having fun. When you don't challenge yourself and your fears, you'll re-find the fun in the waves and want to get back out riding them again.

### 4: Surf fitness

Surf fitness builds confidence, resilience and ability in the waves. So if you're not feeling physically on your game when you paddle out, it can make you feel more vulnerable in the ever-changing terrain of the ocean. Use yoga, surf-focussed fitness classes and cardio vascular exercise such as running and swimming to build your fitness. The resulting strength and stamina will boost your confidence and ability in the waves and diminish your fear.

### 5: Find your flow

Go at your own pace, and slowly build up from smaller waves, surfing with friends and staying within your comfort zone, before moving onto more challenging surf. Be kind to yourself and don't let negative self-talk tell you you're shit. Focus on what you can do, not what you can't. And don't compare yourself to better surfers. It's your surfing journey.

Just remember that everyone has dips in their surfing journey. Once you've faced your fears rationally, reconnected with the ocean and feel confident in yourself and your fitness, you'll find the joy in surfing flooding back and your surfing will progress in leaps and bounds.

# take back control

From taking the drop, to paddling out in big surf, here's how being physically and mentally strong will help you control your fear of surfing.

Let's face it, when you feel rubbish in the surf it feels so demoralising and comes with a sense of failure. If you're not fit, then it's easy to feel overwhelmed and give up easily. Conversely, when you're feeling powerful, it gives you a real mental and physical boost of energy and confidence, which increases your surfing performance. Being stronger means you can improve your surfing ability, which gives you more confidence.

So what are the main elements of fitness?

## Strength endurance

The more explosive power you start with, the more of it can be maintained for a prolonged period of time. In surfing, strength endurance is vital and can be developed through body weight exercises like press ups or light weights. Aim for a basic progression which covers all the main muscle areas.

## Core training

A strong core can enable you to improve your power, performance and stability, which will help you to catch the wave of your life and ride it with style. Core training is your body's foundation, think planks, squats, crunches and lunges.

## Plyometric training

This is what you need to get into waves a bit earlier and boost your wave count. Plyometric training is designed to produce fast, powerful movements, which will enhance your ability to surf harder. Jumps and squat thrusts are good to practice or try a fast paced 10-minute HIIT workout, then aim to build up a session to 15-20 minutes.

Try to do 3-4 regular sessions a week to make a difference. This can be backed up by running and swimming.

## Don't let the mind take control

It's not only fitness which will give you the tools to overcome your fears; if you're mentally strong it will help you too.

Most fear is caused by anxiety and is a result of the mind taking control. To begin to deal with your fear

you need to forget the past, focus on the present and plan for your future. Meditation can help you get into a state of mind where you don't dwell on what has happened or worry about what might. It can help you understand your fears, why you have them and give you the tools to move on from them.

Meditation is a practice where an individual uses a technique – such as mindfulness or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought or activity – to train attention and awareness, and achieve mental clarity and emotional calm. Visualise only positive things: ones you have done today or ones that are yet to use the space you have created in your mind by removing negativity. Fill your thoughts with happiness, positivity and productivity.

Breathwork will help you to stay calm, too. Box breathing is also known as four-square breathing and is practiced by Navy Seals in tense situations, so it's a good one to know! This slow breathing method calms the heart, lowers blood pressure and stress levels, slows your breathing and helps you to think more clearly. To do the Box method you inhale for four, hold for a count of four, exhale for four, then holding the air in your lungs for a count of four again. Repeat this a few times again until you feel calmer and the line-up will feel like a less scary place.

Making an effort to workout and improve yourself will make you physically and mentally stronger for surfing and for life. Being fit will help to increase your self-esteem by seeing the results and improvements in your body. It will give you the confidence to go outside your comfort zone in the ocean and tackle bigger waves without worrying that you aren't fit enough to cope with the extra demands surfing brings.

If you need help then head to SurfGirl Premium at [surfgirlmag.com](http://surfgirlmag.com) where there's a heaps of surf fitness workouts, confidence building techniques and surf improvement tips which will help you.

Surfing is meant to be fun, so keep trying these practices, keep pushing and surfing more in order to get the results you're looking for.

Believe that you can and you will.

