Dear Alice,

I am a young lawyer, and when I have to present in courts, I get REALLY nervous, my whole body is shaking, including my face, and I can hardly speak. I tried all kinds of relaxing techniques, such as breathing, meditation, hypnosis, etc. Nothing helps. What shall I do? It is a serious problem for me. Is there any medication that may prevent me from shaking? Please answer. Thank you very much.

Answer
Dear Reader,

Stage fright, whether the stage is the classroom or the courtroom, affects countless numbers of people around the world. Many people are familiar with the changes in the body that come with the anxiety of having to speak in front of others. A pounding, racing heart, shaky hands, and a trembling voice can make speeches, performances, and/or presentations unnecessarily difficult, if not impossible.

Luckily, there's good news: a variety of methods have been shown to be effective in reducing the described nervousness, including medications. One category of drugs that is of note is beta-blockers. These drugs block the effect of adrenaline in certain parts of the body and reduce the physical symptoms that accompany anxiety, such as blushing, sweating, palpitations, hyperventilation, and tremors. They do not, however, actually treat the psychological component of anxiety; they only control the physical symptoms. Also, beta-blockers can be used on an as-needed basis, which is helpful for situations that only happen every so often or when performance anxiety is predictable.

Since so many other methods of controlling your anxiety have been unsuccessful, maybe it's time to visit your health care provider. There, you can discuss the possibility of taking medication for your stage fright. Be frank about any pre-existing medical conditions and about any medications you may be taking, as they could be important to know before taking beta-blockers.

If you're interested in reading more about public speaking, pick up 10 Days to More Confident Public Speaking by the Princeton Language Institute and Lenny Laskowski and/or In The SpotLight: Overcome Your Fear of Public Speaking and Performing by Janet E. Esposito.

Best of luck with fighting the stage fright!

Alice!

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