



Hi Everyone

I just wanted to check in with you and see how you are doing after so many weeks of lock down, and to remind you that even though you may be by yourself at home, you are not alone.

It can become overwhelming as we are bombarded with more and more media information and instructions to stay indoors. Disrupting all our routines which then can create even more pressure, as we struggle to make sense of it all. It is so easy to get caught up with the current crisis and mayhem.

Despite these troubling times, I want to reassure you that you are not completely powerless with regard to this virus. There is a lot that you can do to help keep yourself safe and sane. So I am going to send this newsletter to help explain why you feel so strange and some practical tips.

DURING A CRISIS, THINGS CAN GET A BIT CRANKY: Over the last week I have struggled to get off to sleep, stayed up late into the night watching endless news bulletins, bought things I don't even like to eat very much, and got angry at people chatting outside for not staying indoors.

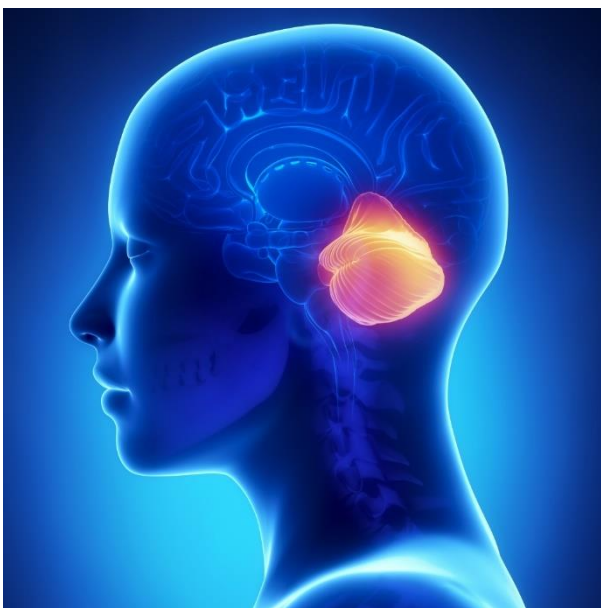
My spelling is a disaster and I'm definitely drinking a lot more wine. At times I've been emotional and snappy and a bit teary, and all I really wanted to do is to eat chocolate. And then I sat down in a quiet moment and suddenly realised what was going on, and from talking to some of my students, I'm not alone.

If you're feeling strange, you may also have noticed all sorts of other strange stuff going on.

- Are you arguing more?
- Talking faster?
- Struggling to sleep?
- Restless?
- Desperate for information?
- Are you teary and overwhelmed?
- Feeling a bit sick?
- Struggling to make decisions?
- Just want to stay in bed? Tummy upsets?
- Having palpitations, butterflies, headaches?
- Ranting, picking fights or getting into arguments?
- Laughing unexpectedly or saying random, inappropriate things?
- Developing Very Strong Opinions on epidemiology overnight?
- Or just want to hibernate and completely gone to ground?

If you are feeling any of these things listed above: The good news is you are not going mad, and you are certainly not alone. In fact, you are completely 100% normal: As

this is the body's natural response to danger. Let me explain a bit more about what is actually going on.



WE ARE EXPERIENCING HYPER STRESSFUL TIMES. Not only are we in the middle of an unprecedented crisis, which potentially presents a mortal threat to ourselves and everyone we know and love. It's also frightening and it makes us feel as though we have no control of our lives. And this is on top of anything else we have going on.

SO WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON.

The Amygdala is a tiny, innocent-looking thing buried behind your ear and is about the size and shape of an almond. It's the bit that is meant to keep us safe when we are frightened and right now, it's in full battle mode.



When we are exposed to threats and need to deal with them, our brain springs into action. In fact the body leads the mind as much as the mind leads the body.

It's a two way conversation and a large part of this conversation is led by the emotions.

Unfortunately, it's a very ancient bit of the brain. It came into being when threats basically consisted of being eaten by large scary animals like tigers.

Well, to the amygdala, everything looks like a tiger. It's also pretty basic, so it really only has two settings. There is no danger, and **DANGER!!!** Check out the book "**Waking the Tiger**" by Peter Levine PhD

SETTING: STUCK ON DANGER!!! Because all threats look like a danger to the amygdala, both mind and body mobilise a vast amount of energy in preparation to fight or escape. This is why it's called the "**Fight or Flight**" response (there's also freeze, meaning you just get paralysed with fear and don't move). It does this by flooding your body with chemicals like cortisol, and adrenaline. Your heart rate goes up, you feel super alert, your breathing goes shallow, and your muscles are ready for action.

These chemicals are also largely responsible for a huge range of other cognitive/physical/emotional reactions. Our responses are also deeply entwined with our past history, to what we are drawn to or move away from.

In a group fear situation like a pandemic, this tends to happen whether you think you're scared or not - anxiety is even more infectious than COVID-19. Your body reacts even if your conscious mind doesn't.

DANGER V VIRUS: Obviously this is all very well if you really are running away from a Tiger. But we're now in a situation where we're stuck indoors and being asked to do the **EXACT OPPOSITE** of running away. We are being asked to process huge amounts of information, make complicated decisions, sit tight and stay calm.

All while a bit of your brain is running around yelling **DANGER! DANGER! DANGER!** And you start to feel like you are going mad!! The result is an awful lot of stress and anxiety. And if you're anything like me, you end up feeling really overwhelmed and having all sorts of reactions.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Anxiety isn't just mental – it's also physical, "An emotion is the bodily response before it becomes conscious. In neuroscience a feeling is the name given to the conscious experience of emotion" (Damasio 2006) you may also notice all kinds of other things: stomach upsets, headaches, insomnia, changes to eating, changes to the way you talk.

It's also cognitive: it's very difficult to think straight when you've got the brain screaming **DANGER! DANGER! DANGER!** So we also become very bad at making decisions, absorbing information and generally thinking rationally. Which is **EXACTLY** what we need to do.

SO WHAT TO DO: well, the good news is that despite these troubling times, I want to reassure you that it is possible get back control of your body and to calm down. **We can turn the amygdala off from combat mode**, and not just by distracting it with over eating and drinking. Here are some solid, scientifically proven things you can do:

BREATHE. It's so basic, but one of the quickest ways are breathing exercises. They work in minutes and you can do them anywhere. They work because of all the physical reactions the amygdala triggers, rapid breathing is the only one over which we have conscious control.

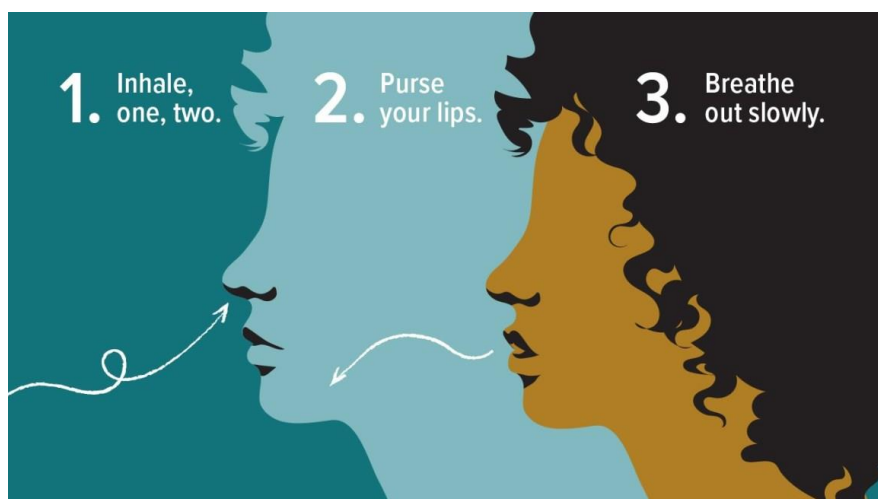
So you are basically telling your body: it's OK. There is no danger. Your body will then start to calm down the adrenaline and cortisol and all the other reactions will slow to a halt.

How to control your breathing?
It's easy – and if you want help just try a "two minute breathe bubble" in into YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZGuQHCjvqY>

The golden rules are these:

- In through the nose, out through the mouth. **SLOWLY**



- **Make the outbreath longer than the in breath – imagine there’s a candle in front of you and it mustn’t go out**
- **Breathe from the tummy not chest – really make your tummy go out when breathing in.**
- **Do it for two minutes and see how you feel**

Seriously, try this it’s a proven system used by everyone from top athletes, corporate executives, and the military to help stay in peak performance while under stress. There are all sorts of versions – from **Yogic Breathing, Heart Math Coherent Breathing, to 4-7-8.** Google them, see what works for you.

<https://experience.heartmath.com/?key=HME-9771-8646-5648G>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=50&v=sKmKKCdnJ4U&feature=emb_logo

CALL A FRIEND: I don’t know about you, but I have really appreciated the calls and



messages that I am getting from friends and colleagues. Don’t suffer alone.

So don’t forget to call friends and family, become a good listener. Sometimes it will be you that needs someone who’ll listen while you have a bit of a rant, or a cry, or a general wobble. Other times it will be you that is trusted to listen and be non-judgemental and who’ll just listen and sympathise. You can’t fix what’s going on so

just give them a bit of space to rant. And if you’re OK, call your friends and check in on them. Especially if they’ve gone silent.

LAUGH: It really has such a positive effect on your body and it doesn’t matter what is. Laughter is a huge releaser of endorphins, the sillier the better. It’s also great for bonding with friends, and will help you feel less alone.

DO SOMETHING WITH YOUR HANDS. As a Buddhist I chant daily which engages all the senses, but if chanting or meditate is not your thing. You need to try something else, as trying to start something new when you’re already anxious is really hard.

So instead, try doing some Cooking. Tidy up that cupboard that you always wanted to do. Have a go at Knitting, Drawing, Baking, and Gardening. Or like me grab all those things you had in your drawer that need mending. This is what is called Mindfulness.



TREAT YOUR BODY: We can hold so much stress in our bodies. If you can take a bath with **Genital Epsom Salts** (very economical from any chemist) and some of your favourite aromatherapy oil. Mine is lavender or a nice long shower.

Put on your favourite clothes, things that feel good on your skin. Use nice smelling body creams it does not need to be expensive. Stretch. Skip. Do yoga. Dance. Eat healthy but delicious things - fresh if you can get it. All of these will help calm you down.

SUNSHINE...amid this crisis – enjoy it. If you can't go outside, open the windows and feel it on your face. If you live in a small flat like I do I actually moved my furniture around so that I could be by my sunny window.

If it's safe for you to go outside (maybe you live in the country) do it, while of course observing social distance. Go for a walk. Being outdoors, connecting to nature, is hugely calming.

STEP AWAY FROM SOCIAL MEDIA/THE NEWS: It will just scare you more and make things worse. Make sure you turn off the telly and give yourself some down time. I know it's hard sometimes, but stick to sensible sources and limit yourself to short need-to-know bits a day. You'll feel better immediately.



STEP AWAY FROM TERRIBLE COPING

MECHANISMS: They will all translate to your brain as DANGER!! Don't get drunk, especially if you're alone your brain will say (DANGER!!), take drugs (DANGER!!), stay up all night reading (DANGER!!), get sucked into conspiracy theories (DANGER!!), Don't forget to BREATH!!.

BE KIND: to yourself and others. Now is not the time to go on a diet. Nor is this the time to start on Proust or makeover your life. You'll probably struggle to concentrate, fail and make yourself feel worse. Don't make this more stressful than it already is. Think comfort books, comfort films, comfort telly, comfort everything.

Everyone is wobbly, and most likely everyone is going to have a meltdown at some point. Try to understand that if someone is snappy, angry or aggressive, then they are also just scared.

Please feel free to share this post, especially if you feel it will help others.

Remember we are all in this together, you are not alone.



I hope that this has been helpful for you, for future appointments please contact me at the number below as I am now taking bookings.

Please remember I am here for you, and in these troubled times it's good to stick together. Things eventually will be alright and in time this to will pass.

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"If you light a lantern for another it will also brighten your way."

Gosho Zensho 1598

