

STYLE OUT YOUR STRESS

When you find yourself in an 'OMG!' moment, don't panic. Here's how to handle even the most dreaded heart-stopping situations **By Helen Russell**

Struggling for breath? Clammy hands? Heart stopped beating? No, we haven't bumped into Mr Gosling - we're having one of those "I can't believe that just happened" moments, which occur when we send an email to the wrong person/see our ex with a hot new girlfriend/get told by the boss that we've got 10 minutes to prep a presentation.

"It's a stress response," explains psychologist Anjula Mutanda. "And it's a very normal reaction to events that make us feel under threat." When we get a shock, most of us go into either fight, flight or freeze mode (aka rabbit in the headlights). In days gone by, freezing helped keep us out of danger, such as when a sabre-toothed tiger ran past and we stood stock still in a bush.

But even though the scary beasts are long gone, freezing is still a hard-wired response whenever we mess up or get a shock. "It feels like your heart has stopped," says Anjula. "Then it actually pumps faster, your muscles tense and stomach churns, as your body becomes flooded with adrenalin and the stress hormone cortisol." But fear not, we've got the solutions...

ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY

Cardiac arrest You "forget" to ask before borrowing a mate's new laptop - then accidentally spill your grande latte over it. If only you'd put off that caffeine fix... "Wishing something hadn't happened is a natural response to heart-stopping guilt attacks," says Anjula. "But the fact you feel guilty isn't such a bad thing - it shows how much you care and want to do something to make things better."

Restart your heart Fess up. Don't hide her laptop under the duvet or deny all knowledge of what

has happened. "Come clean, asap," says Anjula. "Accept that your friend might be angry and not want to talk to you - allow her some time to be cross while you make amends." Offer to save up for another laptop or to get the broken one fixed, then do something sweet, like sending her an "I'm sorry" card with a yummy chocolate brownie, from £4.99 at Sugarpoke.com.



GOSSIP GIRLS

Cardiac arrest You're in the loo at work when you hear two colleagues talking about you at the sink. They think you're having a fling... with the boss. "Hearing someone gossip about you feels like a threat," says Anjula. "Your heart races and you feel hurt and angry." **Restart your heart** Grab a notebook. "Jot down what you heard, how it made you feel and what you plan to do next," says Anjula. Then, pick a quiet meeting room and request a quick chat with your colleagues. "Ask them what made them say those things, but choose your words carefully. Say: 'I felt hurt when...' and 'I'd like to understand why...' rather than going on the attack," adds Anjula. Make it clear there's no truth in the rumour, before leaving. Back at your desk, reboot your self-confidence by thinking about someone who cares for you. US psychologists found this helps restore emotional balance.

EMAIL S.O.STRESS

Cardiac arrest At the end of a manic day, you fire off an email moaning about a mate. And send it straight to her by accident... oh dear. "When we're stressed, our system can get overwhelmed, leading to poor concentration," says Anjula. **Restart your heart** Take time out. "Spend 10 minutes clearing your head before apologising," says Anjula. This will give time for your heart rate to slow and adrenalin to leave your system. When you're calmer, call your friend and admit what an idiot you've been. Say sorry, before explaining you've had a rubbish day and didn't mean to take it out on her. If your comment was about a genuine issue, get a date in the diary to sort it out face to face. But if it was a reaction to how stressed you are, learn to meditate by downloading the Simply Being Guided Meditation app (69p, iTunes).

Photography: Frank Archive Source: University of Jena, Germany



Btw

When stress takes over

Suffering from more "cardiac arrests" than normal? Feeling jittery all the time? "If you feel as though you've been at a heightened state of anxiety for a few weeks, it's possible that you have a more generalised anxiety disorder," warns Anjula. Try keeping an anxiety diary. When faced with a stressful situation, rate out of 10 the worst possible outcome it could lead to. Then go back to the diary after the situation has passed and give it a new rating. You will probably notice second ratings are much lower, which will help you to realise that your anxiety is sometimes out of proportion, and things aren't always as bad as you fear. See your GP if the problem continues.

BAD NEWS DAY

Cardiac arrest You get a tearful call from your mum telling you the family dog has been run over. Hello nausea and a cold sweat. "Experiencing a cocktail of negative feelings is a natural response to dreadful news," says Anjula. Sob. **Restart your heart** Let it all out. "It's important to release negative emotions, as bottling them up may lead to an increased risk of more serious illnesses, like heart disease," reveals Anjula. Recent research found that those who suppressed anxiety and stress suffered from

a raised pulse*, putting pressure on their bodies and hearts. "Crying is a good release, as tears contain cortisol, the stress hormone. So if you feel like a blub, just go for it - you'll flush stress-related chemicals out of your body," says Anjula. You can also let go of pent-up anxiety by exercising, or even just by having a chuckle. "A good laugh can be an effective release," adds Anjula. Keep the chortles coming with the 18,000 Cool Jokes app (free, iTunes). Ha! **F**