

What have we become that has made so fearful?

The recent out-of-control fires across so much of Australia galvanised us as a community to care for our neighbours and be concerned about climate change. Then in a heartbeat, COVID-19 has focused our attention towards fear and stockpiling toilet paper. As a nation are we addicted to fear?

Fear is one of our biggest triggers for anxiety and we already live in an increasingly fear-filled world. It might feel very challenging to be proactive rather than reactive right now, but there are small steps we can take to stay centred and calm. As well as washing our hands regularly, we can increase our level of self-care. Take vitamin C, extra zinc and magnesium, get enough sleep and drink 8 glasses of water every day. These practical suggestions boost the immune system and support both mind and body.

Negative tribal energy, stimulated by watching too much-repeated news or repeated social media, and fear-induced reporting does none of us any good. Turn off the TV and disconnect from (or reduce) social media. Human connection is important now, more so than when everything is 'normal'. Be especially kind to ourselves when we are feeling vulnerable; breathe deeply, be gentle with our self-talk; ask for, and give, more connection with others.

We have one of the best health care systems in the world. Yet over 2 million Australians suffer from anxiety. Research suggests that 45% of Australians are expected to experience some form of mental health issue in their lifetime. Anxiety, stress and pressure are everywhere: in work, home, family relationships, on the roads, on our screens, wherever we go there seems little opportunity for peace.

As stress levels rise, our in-built mechanism of fight-flight-freeze, which enabled our survival as a species, is generating a constant state of anxiety. We now fear situations where the stakes are much lower, the same fight-flight-freeze responses our ancestors experienced when their lives were threatened are activated sometimes on a daily basis. Our environment of constant stress has turned this life-saving mechanism into overwhelming anxiety that we try to soothe, avoid or numb.

Whilst our ancestors were able to put aside their anxiety to rest until the next battle or event, our fast-paced technology; TV, social media and texting, drives us to feel like we are never quite free of pressure. Thus, we see anxiety becoming our new normal.

For each of us, identifying and acknowledging anxiety, stress and fear are first steps to rebuilding resilience. To notice when cortisol and adrenaline are activated; when our mind starts to race, hands tremble, or there's a shaking sensation in our chest. This is the time to build resilience. We may not be able to control the outer circumstances of our lives, however by being aware of what's happening within, immersing ourselves in such small moments, we

can develop resilience through mindfulness, presence and being in the current moment. All of this; not leaping forward, imagining the worst-case scenario.

Self-care is enhanced through being kind to ourselves; positive self-talk and behaviour, developing strong self-esteem, letting go of seeking approval from others, looking after ourselves physically and emotionally and being true to ourselves. When we treat ourselves with the same enthusiasm as we do others: family, friends and colleagues, then we can operate from integrity. Giving ourselves sacred service before others creates a strong base of authenticity.

Centre yourself in gratitude, being grateful for a cup of tea beside the bed, the birds singing, a beautiful day, work, family and all the things that matter to us. When the world around us seems like it's gone mad, noticing these small things, helps to remind us of what's working in our lives.

We are all feeling very vulnerable and exposed at the moment, being extra kind to ourselves and others, is important right now. When those around us are being triggered, take the time to listen, acknowledge and encourage them. Be kind to strangers as well as people who matter.

Now is a great time to develop skills for self-care. Conscious breathing, detachment, positive self-talk, staying out of other people's business, visualisation, and physically supporting ourselves, telling ourselves that things will be OK. These are grounding ways to self-soothe. Displaying compassion for ourselves during times of emotional stress will help us to remain calm and centred.

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