

Fun, Fearless

WORK

EDITED BY SARA AUSTIN

**NEVER
LET
THEM
SEE
YOU
FREAK
OUT**



Crying. Sweating. Turning tomato red. *At work.* They're all perfectly normal but totally mortifying—and now they don't have to happen again.

BY PAULA DERROW

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Fun, Fearless Work

In my first performance review at a new job, my supervisor spent 20 minutes tearing apart a project I'd just turned in. My underarms were drenched, my face was burning, and my lips were trembling.

If only I'd kept my composure, I could've reminded her of all my projects she loved. But I've never been one of those cool-as-a-cucumber types. I'm not wired that way. "The more connective tissue you have between the analytical and feeling sides of the brain, the more your emotions and thoughts tend to be intertwined," says management consultant Katherine Crowley, coauthor of *Working With You Is Killing Me*. While I don't strive to be as cold-blooded as Claire Underwood, I also don't want my body betrayals making me look unprofessional. So I asked the experts for help keeping it together.

You are speaking up in a meeting and feel your face blushing bright red.

When you're stressed, you breathe faster. Then your blood vessels dilate to help funnel more oxygen and blood to your muscles, which is why you look pink.

HEAD IT OFF "Sip cold water before a stressful situation, and carry a water bottle with you to sip as needed," says Amy Wechsler, MD, a dermatologist and psychiatrist in NYC. It helps cool your body.



IN THE MOMENT Concentrate hard on whatever it is you're trying to do—the specific point you want to make or the words in your presentation. When blush-prone people focus on a task, their flush fades, suggests a study.

You're sweating like you're at hot yoga instead of an interview.

Anxiety makes sweating worse, but some people have hyperhidrosis—excess sweating. It's exacerbated by stress, says Dr. Wechsler, and "it can happen whatever the temperature."

HEAD IT OFF Wear loose-fitting tops in natural fabrics, like cotton and bamboo, which trap less heat than synthetic ones, like polyester. Sweat a ton in all circumstances? Your doc may recommend

Botox, which helps some people.

IN THE MOMENT Recite a mantra. It sounds almost too easy, but studies suggest that focusing on a pleasant phrase and saying it to yourself in rhythm with your breath—"I've Got This"—can almost instantly turn off the stress response. "It lets the reasoning part of your mind take over," says Peg Baim, nurse practitioner and director of the relaxation response resiliency program at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston.

A colleague criticizes your work, and you feel the tears well up.

Crying seems to be in some people's DNA. "A large part of the population has a hair-trigger response when it comes to stress—an estimated 40 to 60 percent are hyper-responders," Baim says.

HEAD IT OFF Make a habit of taking slow, deep breaths—this turns on a different arm of your nervous system. Do it as often as you can, says Baim, "and you'll buffer your stress response all day." In other words, the more you breathe, the less likely you'll be to cry (or otherwise flip out). Put a note that says "Breathe" on your computer as a reminder.

IN THE MOMENT Think about something funny—maybe an inside joke with friends or last night's *Mindy Project*. The key is to pivot your awareness. "Laughter—or simply thinking about something funny—is its own unique physiology," Baim says. "It turns off your stress response and takes your brain from crisis mode to calm surprisingly quickly."

A cold sore erupts on your lip just in time for your PowerPoint.

Cold sores are caused by the herpes virus. They tend to appear when you're sick, stressed, or sleep-deprived, says Dr. Wechsler. They can also crop up if you've gotten too much sun over the weekend.

HEAD IT OFF If you get five outbreaks a year, ask your doctor for an Rx for Valtrex, an oral antiviral medication. Other ways to prevent cold sores: Use lip balm with SPF, because sunlight can trigger an outbreak. And don't share towels, silverware, or drinks (you never know who else might be getting a cold sore).

IN THE MOMENT Dab antibiotic ointment on top, like Bacitracin, then smooth on concealer. "Just make sure you don't use anything drying," says Dr. Wechsler. "You want to keep the area moist, which will help it heal." And don't panic. Most cold sores heal within a week. ■