

Cultural Daily

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Why Do Monday Mornings Feel So Harsh?

Risa Williams · Monday, October 11th, 2021

Despite the fact that for many years I have been working on the practice of “going gentler” in my thoughts, there are some Monday mornings where I wake up only to discover that my first thoughts are really harsh and dread-inducing. Before I’ve even fully woken up, sometimes my thoughts are already racing forward with stress before I can stop them: “How will I finish all these tasks?” and “I won’t be able to get it all done!” Which leads me to wonder, why do Monday mornings feel so *particularly* harsh on the brain?

One reason for this might be the Cortisol Awakening Response (CAR), which is something that our primitive brains might have developed to jolt us awake and prepare us to run from predators quickly. This burst of the stress hormone cortisol may work to jolt us awake, but it can also cause us to feel anxious and overwhelmed very quickly. This might explain why we might suddenly experience a rush of negative thoughts on Monday mornings, since we’ve probably just experienced a few slower, non-work packed days beforehand. The contrast between a rest period and having to work, combined with the CAR (not to mention whatever exhausting stuff you may have done over the weekend) might make Mondays feel a little more shaky to navigate.



That Monday morning feeling.

So how do we reclaim our Monday mornings from the negative emotional downpour that wants to instantly flood our brains?

- **Calm the negative thoughts down as they pop up.** Often, we just can't get to a place of positivity in the morning, our brain and bodies may need a little time to ramp up to that. Instead, focus on isolating the negative thoughts as they appear. Label those dread inducing thoughts as "harsh" or "unhelpful" as they appear. This helps you gain mindful awareness of what's happening in your brain so you can redirect your thoughts.
- **Take long deep deliberate breaths.** One of the quickest ways to calm down a cortisol response in your body is to take long deep deliberate breaths in and out. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, and hold for four seconds. Repeat this for a few minutes straight until you feel the stress slide down to a manageable place.
- **Slow down on purpose.** When we're feeling our stress levels spike, we tend to want to physically get caught up in the fast frenzy of it all. Slow down on purpose – move slower, sip your coffee slower, read your emails slower. Let your brain catch up to where it needs to be in a smoother way.
- **Avoid looking at your phone first thing in the morning.** These days many of us have an urge to grab our phone while we're still in bed and start scanning stress-inducing emails and headlines right away. Try to resist this urge. Wake up slowly and do a few things first before bombarding your brain with stress. Circle back to your phone after you've given yourself enough time to fully wake up in an easier way.
- **Remind yourself to be kinder to yourself.** Instead of spending Monday morning beating yourself up about things you need to do, start with the intention of going to a place of "kindness" in your thoughts. Even if all you say is, "I'm going to practice being kinder to myself today" sometimes this can be enough to reset yourself and get back on track.

The kinder you can be, the slower you can make yourself go, and the more deep breaths you can take to regulate your body and brain, the more Mondays will feel start to feel less harsh and more gentle for you to experience each week.

Risa Williams is the author of *The Ultimate Anxiety Toolkit: 25 Tools to Worry Less, Relax More and Boost Your Self-Esteem* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

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