



By Emily McAuliffe

STONE YOUR MIND

Sometimes you do freaky deaky things – like calling your boss “Mum” or imagining your phone’s ringing when it’s not. Yep, at times your mind has a, er, mind of its own. But that doesn’t mean you’re nuts. Here’s why you move in mysterious ways, plus how to keep your kooky side in check...

THE WEIRDNESS Drawing blanks

WHY IT’S OK We forget things – like where we put our sunnies or, um, what were we looking for? – because of the effort it takes to shift info from our limited short-term memory to our longer-term memory, says Dr Chris Hatherly, national research manager at Alzheimer’s Australia. “If you’re rushed, stressed or tired, it’s less likely information will be transferred.” Our short-term memory tends to decline with age, but absentmindedness shouldn’t be

confused with dementia. “Normal is forgetting where you put the car keys. More serious is forgetting what to do with them,” says Hatherly. **KEEP IT IN CHECK** “Successful remembering requires you to put energy into the thing you’re trying to remember,” says Daniel Kilov, two-time silver medallist at the Australian Open Memory Championship, who’s speaking at November’s Mind & Its Potential conference. “The most memorable associations are those that [bust] our expectations. If you’re trying

to remember a shopping list, which of these is the more memorable mental image: a packet of sausages or a string of sausages, which, when accosted by a hungry dog, rears up like a cobra? Making the image energetic and surprising transforms the mundane into the memorable."

THE WEIRDNESS Oops words

WHY IT'S OK Calling your boyfriend your ex's name is awkward. But, says Kaye Swanton, CEO of LifeWorks counselling services, everybody experiences Freudian slips: "A slip occurs when a thought, a wish or a concern breaks away from unconscious functioning, where the thought or wish might otherwise be repressed."

KEEP IT IN CHECK Being sleepy or preoccupied make our unconscious more likely to speak for you, so psychologist Anita Boettger advises saving important talks with your boss, partner or the tax officer for when you're alert. Might not completely prevent it, though: "Freud believed the brain occasionally gave repressed information to the mouth without consulting us first," says Boettger. "If this is accurate, then the very nature of Freudian slips makes it impossible to prevent them." Oh.

THE WEIRDNESS Talking to yourself

WHY IT'S OK Out-loud monologues could, in fact, be sensible, according to a recent study in the *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*. It found subjects who voiced the name of the object they were searching for were able to pinpoint it more quickly because speaking influences cognitive and perceptive processes. And University of Toronto, Canada, researchers found talking yourself through tasks can control impulses like getting distracted by, say, Oporto-burger cravings.

KEEP IT IN CHECK What are you telling yourself? It's only a bad sign if it's neggy stuff like, "I'm a moron, why did I do that?" says Boettger.

THE WEIRDNESS Phantom vibration syndrome

WHY IT'S OK Baystate Medical Center, US, found 68 per cent of us sometimes imagine our phones ringing when they're not. What the? Researcher Dr Michael Rothberg explains that, because of the sheer mass of sensory info you deal with, your brain makes sense of the world based on what it's used to looking for. So in this mobile-centric world, you may interpret slight movements as someone trying to contact you.

KEEP IT IN CHECK If you're one of the 13 per cent of people who sense phantom vibes daily, switch your phone off vibrate mode, say the Baystate researchers.

THE WEIRDNESS Pedantic habits

WHY IT'S OK Feel the need to straighten flyers on a cafe counter? Habits and rituals help us feel more in control, particularly in stressful times, says Boettger. Plus, says psychologist Aleks Srbinoski, it can simply be about wanting things to look nice: "Humans... are attracted to beauty and are designed to solve puzzles and find meaning in things."

KEEP IT IN CHECK Your habits and rituals are fine as long as they aren't related to anxiety and fear. So ask yourself, "Am I doing this out of preference, or because I feel I have to?" says Boettger. "If you're eating layers of a biscuit in a particular order because you're saving the best till last, that's just a preference. But if you feel you must use that sequence to prevent your house from burning down, it may be a good idea to talk to someone." *wh*

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