

## Beating an insidious epidemic

By Ruth Ostrow

**AT first I thought it was me. Then I noticed other women had the condition, so I put it down to hormones - premenstrual, post-menstrual, mid-cycle, peri-menopausal, menopausal. But then I noticed that men had it, too. My God, everyone seemed to have caught this condition, which is as common as the common cold: crankiness.**

It's everywhere. Not rage, which I categorise as that red-faced, hostile condition that afflicts us as we sit behind drivers doing 40km/h in a 60km/h zone, or stand in a shop behind someone struggling to make \$10 from 5c coins.

This is far more benign but more insidious, like a flu that never comes but leaves the skin aching and the nose running nonetheless. Crankiness is the sad cousin, the poor relative, of anger. It's where one wants to scream but hasn't the stamina. It's scratchy, like fingernails over a blackboard – snappy, bitchy, rude.

It's the face of your partner when he or she comes home from work, the kids as they get up in the morning, the shop assistant serving with a sneer. It's in the voices of your friends. They are cranky because you've called them at the wrong time, or too often, or not often enough as they whinge about their spouses and kids and other friends who've made them ... you guessed it.

Short fuse-itis seems to have become the social epidemic of our times. But why? Depends on who you ask but health experts put it down to intolerance of chemicals and plastics. Nutritionists claim our processed foods no longer contain minerals that keep our brains sane – magnesium, zinc and other mood-stabilisers. Psychologists say it's the fast pace of living; philosophers put it down to the lack of meaning, lack of community; while medical professionals cry "hormones".

I think everyone just wants too much of us and we feel emotionally fatigued, drained, dry, exhausted. When the bucket is empty, there is no more to give, not even a smile or a polite, forgiving nod. It's all too hard.

The cure is acknowledging that we feel parched, and to "re-moisturise". We need to spoil ourselves, learn to say "no". Winter is a very drying time. Eat yummy foods, cuddle lots, keep warm, rub oils into the skin or lie in a bath playing great music. Try to feel nourished.

I'll stop now because I know the truth. My good advice is making you feel really cranky.

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