

#LIFEHACKS

Calming the nerves: How to overcome stage fright

Increased heart rate, dry mouth, butterflies in the stomach, and a fear of failure or embarrassment...stage fright is the stuff of nightmares and for many performers, an unshakeable enemy that is hell bent on ruining everything.

I recently had a chance to take part in the Global Encounters Arts and Sports Festival in Dubai, representing Bangladesh in the Vocals category. For someone who enjoys singing, I am painfully nervous. Therefore, once I push myself to sign up for public performances, the days leading up to the actual act are pure torture.

Most performers understand the world to be a fairly judgemental place. We are perhaps more scared of embarrassing ourselves than others who work outside of the limelight. Stage fright is just that, the fear of slipping up and embarrassing ourselves in front of an audience.

It catapults the body into the fight or flight mode and while absolutely normal, the consequent physiological reactions can hamper performance. This is exactly why a perfectly well-rehearsed song can sound off tune during the main performance or why a common word will make one stutter through an entire presentation.

The good news, I have learned, is that with enough practice and preparation, this anxiety can quickly be managed, and even turned into excitement.

Practice

If there is one sure-shot way of acing a public appearance, it is practice. Knowing your material inside out can build confidence and reduce uncertainty. I spoke to some friends in Dubai and most, like me,



had simple ways to counter their anxiety.

"I practice in front of a mirror," shared Sajina Manjee, a vocalist from Dubai. "This way I can see my actions and expressions, and know which ones to keep and which to eliminate."

The young performer maintains that it reduces awkwardness and streamlines her performance to whatever is really working for her."

You can also record yourself or perform in front of friends and family. The better you know your content, the less chance you have of making mistakes on the big day.

Relaxation methods

A body in fight or flight mode will sweat



more, tremble more and result in a sandy mouth. Practising deep breathing helps detangle those nerves, and mindfulness meditation can also help in reducing physical tension and promoting mental clarity.

Farhad Shami, a 17-year-old hip hop dancer from Malaysia, warned, however, that while these techniques can help with stage fright, they must be practised ahead of time. "It isn't something you hurriedly do, an hour before you go on stage."

Mental Preparation

For someone with acute anxiety, having to perform before an audience of twenty thousand may seem like an

insurmountable challenge. People have managed to do this, however, with gradual exposure.

A dancer from Lisbon, Nurina Pirani says she volunteered to perform in front of smaller, less intimidating audiences, even if it gave her jitters. "Temporary discomfort can quickly turn into positive adrenaline, and it helps you ride out those few, crucial minutes of performance time."

Once you are used to seeing a sea of expectant faces in front of you, and hearing the applause, of course, the next step is to hold on to that warm feeling of euphoria. Visualise the encores before you go on stage and remind yourself that you are in that space because someone thought you were capable enough to be there.

Pep Talks

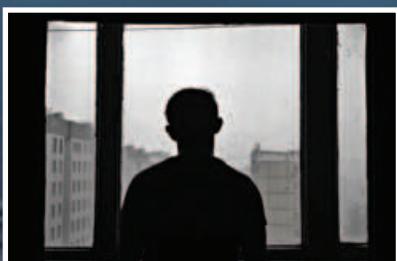
It is important to reframe negative thoughts. I have done this myself, and I can vouch for it. Each time I caught myself thinking anxious thoughts like, "I will mess up and embarrass myself", I quickly reminded myself of my hours of relentless practice and how well I knew my stuff.

Focus on positive affirmations such as "I am prepared" and "I am capable."

Remember that no one in the audience knows your performance, so mistakes are bound to go largely unnoticed. Be your own coach and tell yourself that you are in the best position to excel, at the peak of your practice and that it is only a few minutes to get through before that overwhelming, earth-shattering applause is yours.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Collected

Post-travel depression is real – here's how to cope



How many of us have felt sadness, emptiness, or anxiety that we were unable to describe, after returning from a trip? Well, you're not alone because travel depression is real and it can stay on like an unwelcome guest long after we come back and get back into the grind. So, what is travel depression and why does it hit? Almost always, travel is associated with excitement, adventure, and relaxation. We spend weeks, maybe months saving up for our trip and then an equal amount of time day dreaming about it. And then, once that trip is completed, we suddenly realise, it's over.

The day dreams have been lived out, and there is nothing else as much fun to look forward to, at

least in the immediate future. Our days preceding the trip had revolved so much around it that reality seems lacklustre in comparison.

While not officially recognised as a clinical disorder, travel depression is a real emotional response characterised by symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, sadness, and loss of interest in daily activities.

The real concern? While a good number of people naturally readjust in a few days, others can hold on to the pain for a lot longer.

We agree, returning to familiar obligations, work pressures, and monotonous routines can be tough and can lead

to considerable emotional distress. If you wish to be kind to yourself, allow yourself time to process these emotions. Talk about them with friends, bask in the memories and begin using those holiday goodies you've picked up during your time there.

Next, try to establish routine as much as, and as early as possible. This, in no way, means that you ignore your emotions; simply channel them the right way.

A major contributing aspect of travel blues is the high expectations associated with travel itself. Many people envision their trips as perfect escapes, full of joy and adventure. When reality falls short of these idealised visions, it can lead to disappointment.

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