

## September Musings – Even Peckanese Do It

What contagion effect is shared by parakeets, pooches and people parachuting from planes?

Well, it ain't no Mexican wave, even though Olympic athletes getting ready to compete are likely to do it.

So too are monkeys, mice, monotremes and meerkats.

If you're scratching your head wondering what Olympic athletes, pooches, parakeets and parachutists have in common, apart from having backbones, (a given for parachutists jumping from planes in my book), they all engage in the simple act of...*yawning*.

Yes...yawning.

Now if you think yawning, you're likely to think sleepy, bored, tired...but have you ever considered stressed? Yes...stressed.

Move over misconceptions. No longer is it a case of gulping oxygen to air to redress body imbalances. Researchers are starting to unravel the mysteries of yawning and in doing so now believe that one of the functions of yawning is to keep our brains alert in times of stress.

Yawning is a great way of keeping group vigilance in many animal species who may come under threat.

Indeed, when the amygdala, the brain's smoke detector that picks up threatening cues to engage the fight/freeze/flight response, kicks into action, the resulting stress and anxiety causes our brain to get hotter. Yawning helps it cool and keep its 5-star rating.

Apparently it all boils down to temperature. A hypothesis that's leading the charge suggests that yawning plays an important role in keeping the brain at a cool, optimal, working temperature.

According to Andrew Gallup, an assistant professor of psychology at the State University of New York at Oneonta, the brain is very sensitive to overheating, which triggers yawning and thus instant air-conditioning for the brain. This is said to explain why yawning tends to occur more in summer.

A rise in optimal brain temperature will therefore adversely affect our reaction times, memory and performance in general.

So if you're sitting in a meeting, a lecture or a training session and you start yawning, you're likely to spread contagion, Trainers, lecturers, chairpersons...take heart. That 4-letter word doesn't necessarily spell boredom or stress. Just up the ante on the air-con!

And if you're feeling stressed, take a leaf from an Olympic athlete about to hit the track or an AFL footy finalist before initial bounce down at the MCG and yawn. Just fake it till you make it.

It's quick, easy and it packs a punch.

I hope I haven't bored you

Till next month...stay cool!

Caroline