

‘Quirks of our reptilian brains’: Why looming deadlines can cause paralyzing anxiety

Do you ever get so overwhelmed with schoolwork that all you can do is curl up on the couch and watch Netflix, ignoring your impending deadlines? Are you ever instantly transported to your childhood, waiting for your favourite meal, after you catch the scent of a certain spice?

Why does this happen? These two quirks of the human brain result from three interconnected systems: our reptilian brain, limbic brain, and neocortex.

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Modern reactions to stress can be traced to reptilian reactions to environmental stressors. When presented with a stressor like a predator, our aquatic ancestors automatically engaged in a fight-or-flight response. As this response pertains to survival, our reactions to life-threatening stressors can be traced to the reptilian brain.

However, our fight-or-flight responses are also triggered when facing a stressor like an impending school deadline. Either we “fight the predator” by buckling down and nailing our assignment or we “run from the predator” by avoiding it and binging Netflix. Our primitive reptilian brains are unable to tell the difference between a predator-based stressor and an assignment-based stressor. All it knows is that we are stressed and need to fight or flee.

Next time you feel stressed about an upcoming school deadline and flee to Netflix, you can thank your reptilian brain!

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)