

Writer's Block. It's the grizzly bear of writing problems, casually pushing over any trees you climb up to try and avoid it. Sooner or later as a writer you are going to be confronted by a blank page (or these days, screen) and have no idea what to write. It's frustrating, painful and frightening.

It's also really no big deal at all.

Saying it never happens doesn't really help. Certainly there are people who never seem touched by it; they are the exception not the rule. Don't feel bad if one of your writing buddies says they can write 3000 words without even really trying. The trick is that *you can too*. There are three main causes, and three easy fixes for writers block. Over the next few days I'll go into these causes and their cures.

Cause 1: You're tired

Just written 6000 words in one hit? Including a hyper intense scene where the protagonist is in mortal danger? It's midnight, go to bed. Writer's Block is most commonly encountered by over worked, stressed out writers trying to force themselves to write brilliant prose. Writing is a lot like lifting weights, your body needs time, and rest, to adapt to the demands being placed on it. You can build up to it. Jumping straight into 2000 word days will cook your brain like a microwave pizza and leave you staring, drooling and crying in front of your laptop.

Being over tired can also obviously come from other things in your life. I spent some time trying to write, working fulltime, lifting weights and training for a Mixed Martial Arts fight. I got injured (no one was surprised) and when I went back and looked at what I was writing, very little of it made any sense. I was simply doing far too much and pushing my body and my mind far beyond what I was used to.

These are fairly obvious, but emotional exhaustion is the one that takes the biggest toll on the writers I know, me included. This cause is particularly bad because of the idea that you need to suffer to write (which is bull pucky by the way). Sitting down to write after having a huge argument with your spouse or a death in the family may give you inspiration to write, but if you're trying to write a novel (as opposed to writing for catharsis, which is different) then giving yourself some time to process the emotions will give you more inspiration, not less.

The Fix!

Sleep is the first order of the day (and night) for writers. None of us get enough sleep unless we're unemployed. Everyone needs differing amounts of sleep, but usually if you're getting less than 6 hours a night, you will be. If you're having issues with sleeping then take a look at the articles on sleep over at www.familydoctor.org, they cover your sleeping environment in more depth than I ever could.

Truth be told though, we all know we need to sleep. If your sleep problems are ongoing, you may need to speak to a doctor. What should you do if you have a short term exhaustion problem and a blank white screen looming in front of you?

You can start with coffee. It certainly won't help in the long term, but it will boost your mood. Good quality coffee also contains high levels of anti oxidants that can help with your overall stress level. You can also get caffeine pills and energy drinks, but if you can stomach it (and afford it!) then high quality coffee is the best caffeine delivery system you can get.

After a couple of days of relying on coffee though, it's going to start losing its effect. If you're going to be losing sleep, or are under any kind of elevated stress for more than a few days, then it is worth considering taking an adaptogen. Now, obviously I'm not a doctor, nor a medical practitioner of any kind, so ALL advice in this regard needs to go via your doctor before you take it on board.

Read that bit again.

Okay. Now, adaptogens are a class of herb that helps your body adapt to stressful situations, such as increased exercise, lack of sleep or...writing deadlines. I have found the best results with a herb called Rhodiola Rosea; however Siberian ginseng and true ginseng are other popular options. These don't give you a boost in the same way that stimulants do, they just help your body return to a happy baseline (homeostasis for those of you who've studied some biology).

Stay tuned for part two, where I look at what to do if you aren't tired, just stuck!