

How to Become Slightly Paranoid and Completely Unbalanced

Make sure the television channel rarely strays from Lifetime. Movies where women are consistently beaten and raped are sure to trigger anxiety.

Think about skin cancer and ponder if it's a relatively new phenomenon. Decide the ozone used to be in much better shape so probably not. Or, maybe, people just didn't live long enough.

Think about how the Midwest sits on the New Madrid fault line and speculate when another earthquake will happen. Decide Midwest has taken very little precautions to earthquake-proof buildings. Conclude Midwest is screwed if another big earthquake such as the one in 1812 rumbles along. Try hard to remember if that was really the year when it happened or if you made the number up trying to sound cool. Realize you're thinking so you don't have to sound cool to yourself. Decide you'd like to see a tornado. Conclude it would make you soil yourself so you should just stick to watching storm-chasing shows on television, which also trigger anxiety.

Choose to take your dog for a walk. After carefully scanning the neighborhood out of your windows and front door and seeing no random strays in the vicinity, decide your eighty-pound dog will not be maimed and it is safe to begin walking. Start the walk, keeping your hand on the pepper spray in your pocket just in case you encounter a stray dog who tries to fight yours. Keep hand on pepper spray the entire walk. Increase walking speed because envisioning your dog mutilated and ripped apart makes you want to cry. Stop walking and kneel down to pet your dog. Hug him and tell him he's your best friend and you love him. Wonder if anyone is watching and start speed walking again.

Look up at the sky, remembering Chicken Little. Liken an asteroid collision to “the sky is falling.” Thinking about a giant asteroid ramming Earth; name it Crash. Since you’d only have a couple of days to live if Crash were to stop at Earth on its vacation through the universe, make your mind up as to who you’d want to track down and punch in the face. Immediately pick the guy you lost your virginity to, former not-your-president Bush, the creators of American Idol, the entire cast of Friends, and the band U2. Stop entertaining this fantasy and feel guilty because Buddha wouldn’t like your violence. Smile and feel calm knowing the person with whom you’d disintegrate when Crash hit is your dog. But he’s not technically a person, duh.

Wonder if you’ll get <insert latest health scare here>. Decide probably, and besides, even if you don’t get it, the disease will just mutate to be the New Bubonic Plague or something and most of the world will die anyway.

Read up on every disease (new and old) to ensure your ailments match perfectly. Become convinced you suffer from multiple sicknesses. Make so many doctor appointments you’re soon on placebo pills, which you’re convinced are giving you side effects. Then attribute all aforementioned health problems to PMS and stop taking pills altogether. Tell yourself pills cause adverse effects on your health.

Right before every period begins, think you’re pregnant. Dismiss that notion since you wouldn’t be chosen for Immaculate Conception but decide cramps are the work of the devil and you want birth control. When your friends say “so get on birth control,” tell them you quit taking pills because they are bad for you and all other kinds of birth control increase your risk of cervical cancer by 315%. Decide making up random horrible statistics makes you feel slightly giddy and resolve to do it more. You begin to

wonder if you might have a chemical imbalance. Decide it may be a hormonal imbalance and get on birth control anyway. Besides, you may need it just in case maybe a boyfriend comes along. Kinda like those just-in-case-Christians believe in God, you know, just in case.

Start looking up mental disorders in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, latest edition. Become convinced you're an expert, so much so you can diagnose every single friend and family member (those who still talk to you, anyway) with an illness. Find seven for yourself. Start making up more random statistics to make yourself feel better about being mental. Call up your friend Sandy to tell her 37% of all females will get a bug lodged in her ear canal. Remember a time when your ear specialist told you about a little boy who had an earful of cockroach. Hang up on Sandy to run into bathroom to inspect your ear as it hurts a little bit. You can't see the inside of your ear so stick your finger in it but don't feel anything and wonder if it's deeper in your ear canal. Then remember you made up that statistic and feel somewhat better but make an appointment with your doctor anyway.

Decide to cook chicken. Become so horrified at the thought of salmonella you nearly have a panic attack. Lysol your hands, then wash them *and* the Lysol bottle. Repeat this *several* times throughout your attempt to cook. Throw chicken in glass baking dish, use fork to move it into place. Use a lighter to burn fork prongs before sticking the fork in boiling water. Again, Lysol your hands, then wash them, then wash the Lysol bottle. Cook chicken at 350 degrees for thirty minutes. To be sure it's done, cook it for forty-five minutes. Nod your head in satisfaction as you remember salmonella is the reason you won't keep a turtle for a pet.

Swear things have been moved around the apartment almost every time you come home. Feel a little creeped out because you live alone and never mastered peeing while standing up and ask yourself “why then, is the toilet seat up?” Sleep with pepper spray and carving knife underneath your pillow. Scare yourself thinking you may cut yourself during the night and move knife to nightstand.

Think about the packaging conditions of cereal and consider vomiting, but then recall you don't like cereal anyway. Feel better until you do the same with candy bars. Wonder exactly how many insect parts and rodent hairs you've ingested. Question if the insect parts you've eaten add up to a whole bug. Thinking about bugs reminds you there might be one in your ear. Rub ear because it aches.

When you drive, wonder if someone will t-bone or rear-end you. Giggle because “t-bone” and “rear-end” sound naughty. Quickly sober up and look suspiciously at every car you pass. Consider getting car insurance that covers your dog because he goes everywhere with you and make mental note to call insurance agent which you promptly forget until you drive your again. Debate on using your cell to call insurance agent but remember it's not safe to drive while talking on the phone. Quickly forget that when Danielle calls and answer phone by saying “Word. I'm pregnant with your love child.” When she laughs, secretly wonder if she thinks you're weird. Shrug and decide she's the one who's friends with you so what's that say about her?

Walk dog again, hand on pepper spray. Begin thinking about how strange it is you're walking on the surface of the earth and maybe a mile or two beneath you is molten magma, churning and burning to the center of the world. Look at trees and plants and shake your head. Think it's amazing how one mile can make so much difference.

Wonder if some freak event could make magma stream up through sewer systems and pop the man-hole coverings out of the streets. Walk a little faster when crossing streets. Call yourself silly for calling it magma when it's really lava if it's out of the ground, duh.

Wash your hands every time you touch something potentially germy. Don't forget to carry lotion as your hands are sure to dry out from so much cleansing. Become overwhelmed by the potential for germs and try not to touch anything at all. Consider wearing gloves but dismiss the idea as it will make you *look* crazy. Wash your money and Lysol all door handles. Suddenly conscious of the fact you may be making germs more resistant, become so paralyzed with fear you don't move until your dog nudges you.

Wonder if your microwave will kill you with its radiation. Make your mind up to start cooking, for real. But it's too much work to cook for just you, so go back to microwaving meals. Justify it saying someday you will have someone (other than your dog, and yes, you cook for him, a nice pineapple upside down cake for his birthday...though he ate everything but the pineapple upside down) to cook for and you'll make up for all that radiation. Contemplate if you will find someone or die from microwave radiation poisoning first. Decide if worse comes to worse, you'll just eat out everyday. Know eating out is unhealthy too, but it tastes better. Realize you eat entirely too many carbs, but do nothing about it and wonder if you will regret it when you're old and quite possibly decrepit. Decide you'll compromise and take vitamins.

Think about phalates in sex toys. Do research and determine phalates are only harmful in ingested. You know you don't chew on your sex toys, so you're safe. Buzz buzz.

Start sneezing and damn yourself for suddenly developing allergies. Mull it over and decide it could be a symptom of some sickness. Get online to investigate medical conditions with sneezes and get sidetracked when you begin to investigate people. Refuse to call it stalking and prefer the term “researching” despite the fact you’ve looked them up on Twitter and Facebook, you’ve Googled them, *and* you’ve perused their Alma Mater’s website. Laugh at yourself. See ad for online dating and wonder why people do it. Toy with the idea but reason not to because you’ll wind up with somebody with an armpit fetish who likes to be humiliated in bubble wrap, or worse wants to humiliate you in bubble wrap. Stop to consider your own fetish and think maybe bubble wrap wouldn’t be so bad. Laugh at yourself again.

Become *extremely* nervous when you see plain white cars or vans because you believe the government is watching you (maybe they’re the culprits who leave your toilet seat up.) After all, you never hesitate to point out the inadequacies of “the system” and never miss an opportunity to say, “Damn the man.” So why wouldn’t the government think you a liability? That and your brother does drugs. Wonder if any time you’ve given your brother a ride he left drugs in your car. What if he did and you get pulled over and you get charged with possession? Decide that will never happen because good drug addicts use all their drugs, duh.

Take a small break from Lifetime to watch true crime shows. Become convinced someone will kill your parents, friends, and/or other loved ones and you will be the prime suspect. Always leave said parents, friends, and/or loved ones house’s on your cell phone to ensure different towers will pick up your phone signal as you drive away, thus clearing you of any possible charges. You learned that from all the TV you watch.

Begin to walk dog again but realize you forgot pepper spray. Again picture your dog mutilated and ripped apart. With tears in your eyes, return to apartment to get spray. Resume walk, noting that the pepper spray would also come in handy if you were to get attacked.

Any time your friends and loved ones leave a place, go on a trip, or use any sort of transportation, picture them mangled in a horrible accident and repeatedly tell them you love them/care about them and to be safe, be careful, drive safely, take care, use caution, etc.

Like a ninja, be aware of your surroundings. You never know when things might come in handy to defend yourself against attackers. Note: things that make useful weapons are as follows: coffee pots (this possibly counts for two: hot liquid, and it can be busted to use as a stabbing/cutting utensil,) scissors, staplers, thick sticks/small branches, canes, umbrellas, baseball bats (and you can say something cool like “You ain’t nothin’ a Louisville Slugger can’t take care of, asshole,” even if it isn’t a Louisville bat) anything heavy you can throw or at least shot put, such as rocks, padlocks, chains, high heels, etc.

Speculate about which of your cells will rapidly reproduce causing cancer. And wonder if you’ll be on dialysis like your grandma. Shudder at the thought of your blood turning to sludge.

Get the sniffles and a cough. When coughing hurts so bad you’re convinced one or both lungs will collapse, wonder if it’s possible you’ve got whooping cough but know better. See your doctor anyway.

Look down at your toenails; become horrified at the thought of growing old and your toenails may become hardened, yellowed, and thick and you'll have to get your toenails cut by a podiatrist like your Uncle Earl so you won't get gangrene.

Notice a grey whisker on your dog. Take him to vet to get chemical analysis done on his blood to see if there are any supplements you can add to his diet to aide him as he ages. Become slightly agitated when vet suggests to your pooch *you* need anti-psychotics added to your diet. Secretly envision a life under more mellow circumstances. Despair at the thought maybe the vet isn't the only person who thinks you need meds. Call Danielle and Sandy to ask if they think you're crazy. Dismiss their "no's" because they wouldn't tell you the truth anyway.

Spice up your television habits by watching a special on flesh-eating bacteria. Wake up in the middle of the night with a charley-horse, but convince yourself bacteria are devouring your skin. Turn on the lamp and inspect your leg. Have trouble falling back to sleep so sit in bed with lamp on examining your leg until the alarm goes off. Also, become paranoid every time you get something as little as a paper cut that somehow flesh-eating bacteria will infect your wound and you'll wind up disfigured with skin grafts.

When having trouble reaching a decision, play Eenie Meenie Miney Mo to see which wins. Pick opposite choice.

Develop affection for odd numbers. Eat chips, cookies, candies, etc., in odd denominations. Microwave things ending in odd seconds. Squirt three pumps of liquid soap into your hands every time you wash them. Set your alarm for an odd time like 6:07 so that way even if you add up all the numbers, it still equals an odd, but then realize it

equals an even number, sort of, if you multiply them. Get discouraged. Set the alarm for either 5:57 or 6:47 and play Eenie Meenie Miney Mo to decide. Then realize it doesn't have to end in seven so agonize for a bit before deciding it has to be 5:57 because it's close to the time you really need to be up by anyway, sheesh. Then wonder if it should be 5:59.

Quit taking birth control because you reason anything that controls what's supposed to happen to you naturally can't really be good for your health in the long run. Wonder if you've caused permanent damage to your women cells because birth control has only been around for fifty years and, according to you, that's not long enough to properly determine whether or not controlling hormones can cause serious damage to a woman and her offspring and their offspring and so on and so forth. Poke, prod and rub stomach like you would do a breast exam to feel for tumors and growths. Feel slightly ill even though your search yielded nothing of concern.

Realize with a mixture between humor, disgust, and fascination you may have disturbed a whole ecosystem when you pull your hair out of the shower drain. Swear a bug (Jack you called it) is somewhere in that mess; upon not seeing Jack, know he went down the drain. Promise to watch drain until Jack crawls out so you can squish his guts. Tire of this after 47 seconds and turn on the water so he'll drown. If he was there at all. Or maybe he's a she, you think. No matter, get bored and go watch Lifetime.

Take a quiz via the internet that's designed to let you know if you are at risk for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Score a 23 and think 'whew, that's good!' until you learn that anything over a 12 says to seek help immediately. Feel bummed, but conclude your neurosis is kinda cute and builds character. And besides, you'd be pretty damn

boring without it. Decide help can be sought years from now *when* you're wearing rubber gloves and hospital masks, locking your door and checking three times to just make sure in order to leave your house. Note you already do the last one and think help might come sooner than you think.

Walk your dog. Marvel at the tiger lilies, take in the aroma. Resolve to try and relax more and meditate, *really* meditate (don't just think about how you should be concentrating on eradicating your monkey mind, and when your next bill is due, and oh shit did you pay the electric? What are you eating for dinner tonight? Peas sound really good, maybe fruit pizza for desert. Then a walk by the lake perhaps. Where *did* your red and black jacket go? etc.) Be so involved with your thoughts you don't notice the stupid stray until it's already headed for your dog. Scream like a child for the dogs to stop fighting, noting that using pepper spray would most likely affect both dogs. Before you know it, the fight is over, your dog the victor. But still be too scared the other dog will come back with buddies to off your dog and opt not to finish the walk; call someone to come get you and your dog, to which you're clinging. When your ride arrives, rehash the events, cursing stupid unforeseen, uncontrollable events. Damn said events straight to hell (which you don't even believe in) and sigh, very loudly. Inhale, exhale, and do it all over again.