

# AN A-Z OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY ALLERGIES AND A SELECTION OF IDEAS TO COMBAT THEM SUPER FAST

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## A IS FOR ARTICULATION

You sense the opportunities arising: in the pub, by the water cooler, sometimes in a meeting. However, at every timely moment you clam up, shrug your shoulders or look intently at someone else. In your head you are formulating exciting responses to the neoliberal meritocracy, Caitlin Jenner's glossy magazine covers and the uncertainty of the Chinese stock exchange. It's not that you can't talk, it's that when it comes to certain subjects you are frozen.

*The endless sunshine beamed down on the foreign horizon. I could imagine the figures at the end of my sightline gradually moving into view. Who are they? What do they want from me? How soon will they approach? I felt their oppression but it was no more striking than the uncomfortable beads of sweat falling down my back and resting at the curve of my spine.*

An allergy to articulation is treated fairly easily. Find your favourite news channel and witness the people it brings on as experts. Practice similar kinds of vague responses and then begin to gently insert the opinions you had originally hoped to voice. See how easy it is? Try

this method during every encounter and watch people nod, respond, laugh or counter-argue.

### B IS FOR BOREDOM

This one feels hard to admit to, for sure. It's fine for small children to say over and over again, but at your age you should know how to entertain yourself, where to find a good time and how to change all your settings accordingly. Perhaps a mundane DIY task has failed to take over your life, or the simple repetition of a regime that you once held dear no longer fills you with that comfortable, relaxed feeling.

*At the end of the pathway I noticed a small animal quivering as I approached. As I leant in and down towards the creature it grimaced, but let me pick it up and hold it tight against my chest. Gradually it relaxed, sensing the comfortable situation I had created for it. A few moments later, its breathing slowed down and it began to snooze.*

Practice being busy. Go on, try it! Accept every one of those invitations you've been sent. Accept some invitations you haven't been sent. Go out and do things you have never done before. Join clubs, groups and libraries. Get so busy that you often say, 'I would but I'm just too busy.' Then, exhausted, you can't possibly be bored, so stay at home and watch a boxset.

### C IS FOR CARBS

Very few people are genuinely allergic to the carbs. Everyone else should just eat a bit less bread and pasta etc., because really if we're honest they are a bit heavy on anyone's stomach, especially late at night.

### D IS FOR DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis was once something a professionally qualified practitioner would do. Previously, it was not considered something that you could be allergic to. In the 21ST century the sophistication of the internet knocked that on the head, and now you can self-diagnose anytime via Google. Suddenly the belief you have gout, diabetes, shingles and/or a tumour is taking over your life.

*Later that day I met a group of friends on the beach. They rushed to greet me, arms open wide and faces grinning widely. Would I like a beer? Sure! Would I like some food? Sure! Would I like to sing a song? Why not! A breeze picked up and refreshed the blissful scene. It carried away the weight of doubt, and a significant amount of longing.*

It's a little old fashioned, but do visit your local GP. Of course, first leave a brief period for your ailments to clear up on their own.

### E IS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

This allergic response is recognised by its inability to be recognised – the inability of anyone to put their finger on the actual issue or problem. However, if you tried to spend a considerable amount of time in a multiplex cinema, a Megabowl or watching Channel 5, the allergic reaction would be obvious.

### F IS FOR FOMO

FOMO is *very* 21ST century. Scientists, doctors, philosophers *et al* are grappling daily with this issue and why it has recently afflicted

so many of us. They are confused that so many people that appear on the surface to be rational, relaxed and responsive – all of a sudden – can't miss out on ANYTHING.

*The black and white images flickered across the old style square television set. I briefly thought I recognised the film. I thought the plot was familiar, the characters somewhat hazy, a lazy mise en scène created by a factory of sorts. That evening the scenarios echoed around in my head and I dreamt that the end was always the same. The ending was always in fact the beginning.*

There's a passive or aggressive path to choose from when you get around, or simply have the time, to address this response. The passive cure is to simply shut down social media and focus on being blissfully unaware of what everyone is doing. The aggressive route is to become the master of all happenings, setting everything up so that everyone has to be where you are anyway, this way FOMO can't exist for you.

## G IS FOR GRINDR

Or other online hook up applications. It's probably a great way to meet people or get laid, or in very rare occurrences, start a relationship. Yet something about the casual swipe movement and seeing how close potential sexy encounters are consumes you with a deep libidinal panic that can lead to physical allergic responses.

*Carol, Carol! Wake up! I need to talk to you about how I feel. What do you mean, I say? I thought we had already talked. I thought we had already decided how this would end. I thought we had already resolved this. I'm not sure I have the answer you want to hear.*

You can't imagine a self-help manual in the next century including this entry at all. It's just a phase, it will be over soon.

## H IS FOR HELP

It has become very un-cool to ask for help, particularly self-help. You're probably only reading this as you thought this book was different, some kind of contemporary art thing. If you ever find yourself thinking, or saying, 'It's different for me', STOP – this is a sure fire sign that you are, in fact, allergic to help.

*Full moon in an otherwise empty sky. Should no one come to save me, then that's okay, I still have you. I hear a sharp shriek, I choose to return inside, to the safety of my confined space and to the silence I can create inside. Perhaps my thoughts can create a meaning for all of this, and a purpose.*

Take a step back. Think – are my feelings or responses being clouded by something? Am I missing the obvious? Is my moral compass getting in the way of a lucrative decision? Am I being too shy or nervous to ask the person that I know can help me? It is perfectly fine to admit you do not know. On another level, you might also believe the help you are getting isn't really help. Here at least you have established that you need to try something different.

## I IS FOR ME

You actually cannot become allergic to yourself, only to your responses or other people's responses to yourself. Fact. You have to learn to accept that you can control both of these; it is a common misconception that you can only control the former. You control other

people's responses by being the best person that you can, and being really nice and treating them as you would expect to be treated yourself. When all that fails, ignore them.

### J IS FOR JUSTIN (BIEBER)

This is very normal for the early part of the 21ST century. He really did do it to himself.

### K IS FOR KARDASHIANS

This is really serious, because an allergy to the Kardashians points to your complete lack of empathy with all successful celebrities. Of course, you can scorn away, claiming them to be untalented and famous for famous' sake. If that's the case, why are they so omnipresent, rich and have the most Twitter followers in the world?

*A dangerous thought emerged in my head. Perhaps I would like to go out and go shopping. I would like to find something nice that I don't already own. Something that could become mine, and mine alone. Something that could come with me on this journey and become extremely useful. What would that something look like?*

Take a deep breath when they appear before you. It's okay, they aren't directly speaking to you, you can turn the page or change the channel, it's fine to do so. You might secretly soon start to like watching their spin-off programmes. Remember, observing the kind of lifestyle you disapprove of can actually make you feel happy about your own (except Justin Bieber who is just a dick).

*The school corridor of my memory was drab and lacking in colourful coursework examples. The children were all dressed in matching clothes except you. You stood out but I just can't recall what you were wearing, only your smile. I know I shouldn't fixate on this moment. The therapist shouldn't have asked me for childhood memories as now I can't forget you.*

### L IS FOR LOVE

The most serious allergy one can have, after Ragweed. On the upside, it is usually a temporary condition, triggered by an unpleasant experience. In the words of Kelly Clarkson, 'What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger.' Cures include: new projects, work and alcohol.

### M IS FOR MEN

Men sort of creep up on you, don't they? Even if you too are male, you may yet wonder how Men got so omnipresent and so abhorrent that you come out in all kinds of horrid reactions. You will know deep down anyway if this is something that you are allergic to.

*I half understand now that I just wanted to be around people, to be able to be around people, to want to be able to be around people. Is it all about me or you? Does my happiness and fulfilment and contentment have to come from me anyway? I think I have to push in the right direction at least. And I have to allow time for myself and set up some goals.*

You can't cut out the company of Men entirely, even rural retreats let Men attend and of course that doesn't solve your problem if you are male anyway. For advice on being allergic to yourself see 'I is

for ME? Otherwise try to avoid activities that only involve you and Men, keep their presence diluted.

### N IS FOR NORMAL

This one is very mild if prolific. A slippery concept at best, you can identify it when not wanting to do anything that you pliantly did as a child, that your parents do regularly, or that you feel too many people already do. At its extremes you might find yourself using your clothing or other aspects of your physical appearance to make a statement that clearly identifies you as 'not normal'.

*That horrific suffocating feeling came back. Carol, you need to step out of yourself a little. You seem to be making yourself worse. I don't understand, I came here to get better. I came here to try and understand what you think is wrong or at least how I can articulate it better. Can I articulate it better?*

Remember, no-one really wants to be normal in the 21ST century. Do not, however, discount opportunities or experiences solely on this basis, you might miss out on something fun. Note: Pay no attention to how people choose to look, but do compliment if you approve.

### O IS FOR ORIGINALITY

'Original' and 'originality' have become synonymous with the 20TH century. It is nigh on impossible to be original since everything has been done before. Therefore, it is unsurprising that originality can produce a chemical allergy similar to hayfever.

*There was a party in the main room. A birthday party perhaps. But I didn't go this time.*

Try giving up this proclamation full stop.

### P IS FOR PRIORITIES

No one who lives on the contemporary sphere we call Earth can really claim to be good at priorities. There is too much distraction and television and social media going on to actually get things done. Particularly if you regularly set yourself impossible targets, like when you try to finish everything you ever started before a vacation.

*I think it's only normal that we all look for creative solutions. I tried to make a sculpture of the small animal I found. It looked awful, ugly, violent even. I destroyed it before showing it to the rest of the group. During this last act, I felt quite satisfied. Then I felt ashamed at feeling good about destruction.*

There's a passive and aggressive solution to this one too. The passive response is to make lists, make lots of lists, reorder the list, ~~cross things out you have already done~~ and start another list. The aggressive route is to just get things done, starting with what's most important or makes the most sense at that given time. To prioritise becomes easy and you avoid B FOR BOREDOM too!

### Q IS FOR QUESTIONS

Questions can become quite grinding, can't they? A substitute for actually saying something about anything. Or worse, a subtle reverse

psychology to tell you what you should really be thinking. How did you feel when you saw the man steal her purse? What do you think of the current political crisis? Why is this artwork confusing? What does it say about your experiences?

*I thought maybe it's time to move. It's time I should move away and find the answers. I can't breathe.*

Looking for, finding and giving answers is the most common way of relieving question-induced psychosis.

### R IS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

There's a lot of pressure put on relationships of every kind. Some people even say everything is based on relationships, though this is not really the same thing as saying everything is relational. There's a lot of pressure put on relationships of any kind. With so much pressure everywhere, it's therefore not surprising that allergic reactions are developing and relationships seem to often be the cause. It's not what you know, yeah?

### S IS FOR SEX

As in having or not having. This one is difficult and upsetting for everyone. Though fortunately it's fairly rare in the 21st century. If you feel affected, you must understand it's natural to not want to jump into bed with everyone you meet. And not everyone is constantly having sex.

*I can't feel you.*

Self-help might not be the best option here, though before it's too serious, there's the famous 1,2,3 test I like to check by myself before I commit to sex. Will it be more fun if there is only 1 person involved? Are we really 2 sober people? Will it be more fun if there are 3 people involved? If you can answer 'No' to any of these, I think, 'Don't have the sex.'

### T IS FOR THEORY

As in academic theory. It all got a bit too much at some point and whether your opinion is that it's incomprehensible, inaccessible or just plain guff, it's clearly irritating some people. Either embrace it, or don't. Wikipedia gives a good general overview with images. Just please avoid those graphic novels or graphics that purport to explain it, they will make everything worse.

### U IS FOR URBAN

Towns and cities, and all the detritus that is associated with urbanisation from overpopulation to claustrophobia. Cities are getting a bad rep, but they are probably in better shape than previous centuries, with the exception of every city in China. How does one negotiate an allergy to urban living other than by moving out of a city?

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You need an escape strategy. You need to know when you can get an hour, an afternoon, a day, or a weekend off for a holiday. Most of these are easily available even to the tightest of budgets: a local park or nature reserve, an old B&B in the countryside could be very inexpensive on a last minute deal. See, this one is easy!

### V IS FOR VIOLENCE

Violence is probably too big a phenomena to put in here. It's also not a purely 21ST century problem, but then it does feel extremely present in contemporary media – whether we are talking about guns, refugees or tornadoes.

Of course, what I'm talking about is being allergic to F – fear. In whose interest is it to keep everyone afraid? The military-industrial businesses of the so-called 'developed' world need to keep governments afraid so they buy lots of weapons. But how can I eradicate my panic about fear and violence?

*Carol, are you here?*

I can really only offer a statistical approach to overcoming this. It's unlikely that you will encounter violence very much, so there is no need to over-think this. If you are woman you are more likely to encounter violence from someone you know than from walking alone down a dark street. So spend your time working out what can go right and not about what can go wrong. Period.

### W IS FOR WAITING

Throwing in every cliché about the speeded-up-ness of everything – and how the act of, or indeed art of, waiting has become lost. New attitudes to waiting that produce adverse reactions include e-passport gates, wifi connections, and finding a life partner past thirty.

*Yes, I'm still here. I'm here. I'm waiting. I'm looking for you.*

There has to be a return to understanding the inevitability of waiting. Surely this affects EVERY living thing on the planet? How could it not? Time spent waiting can be relieved by talking to other people in the same waiting environment, reading a book or using your smart phone (handily you saved some article on it... just in case wifi speed was slow).

### Y IS FOR YOUTH

There's no need to take it out on the kids, you were one once. And you probably did more of those things than you like to admit. As the Youth are so well read these days it might be that you are one of them, in which case, sorry, you shouldn't need to appear here.

### Z IS FOR ZEITGEIST

See Originality, add PR agency.