

mx Life

Picture: NICOLE CLEARY



When did life get so meh, so so-so, so beige? **AMELIA HARRIS** discovers how to spice up life with a hit of creativity

Colour your world

You used to have fun, be spontaneous, live on the edge. Then you got the job you always wanted, start working and slipped into a comfortable routine. What the hell happened? I'll tell you. Two big capital letters have taken up residence in your life, O and K. And you didn't even notice. Those two squatters can answer a multitude of questions but since when did they sum up your life? Things aren't bad, you still have a job. You still have friends, a roof over your head. Life's OK – but it's not great. It seems as though someone's come along while you were sleeping and painted the big picture in one flat horrible shade of beige. You eat the same thing for breakfast every day, go to the same restaurants and watch the same TV shows. It might be convenient, but Happiness Institute CEO and founder Dr Timothy Sharp says routine can lead to an energy-sapping case of "OKness".

"There are advantages to having routines. We don't want to lose the advantages, but need to balance that against boredom," Sharp says. "OK is better than miserable or better than crap, but I think we could have a much more colourful life if we realise we don't just have to settle for beige." Clinical and coaching psychologist Sharp says beige-ness or OKness can happen to anyone at any time. "It's something we need to be vigilant about at all stages of our lives," he says. "There is kind of acceptance that's it's OK to be OK." He says Aussies, by nature, are not likely to constantly talk themselves up. "We're quite opposed to the cliché American 'Ra ra – I'm fantastic' kind of thing," he says. "We don't want a team or a country of wankers. It's about being as happy and successful as you can be, but expressing that in a sensitive way."

A BRIGHTER SHADE
Getting out of a beige patch doesn't have to be as extravagant as quitting your job or going overseas. You just need something to get you out of the day-to-day, week-to-week routine. Sharp says the first step is to recognise how you feel and say yes to something you might have said no to. "Try a different lunch spot, see different people, go through the What's On section and go to a movie you might have otherwise not seen or a new band," he says. Dr Amantha Imber has made a career out of beating the beige. She's the founder of Melbourne-based creative consultancy Inventium. She says being more creative is another way to take attach jump leads to your life. "We come across a lot of so-called beige organisations where staff are sitting in the standard grey-walled cubicles with no natural light

and working in quite risk-averse environments," Imber says. "Science shows us anyone has the ability to think creatively. Yet there are stacks of people who don't think they're creative." Imber's creativity boosters, which feature in her first book, *The Creativity Formula*, range from the wild and wacky to the well-known. It could be as simple as putting some bright-coloured cushions on your couch or bed or a photo of something natural on your wall. Both these tips trigger feelings of happiness or calmness, which make us think more creatively. If you're after something more, well, creative, Imber recommends clenching your left fist when you're struggling to think outside the box. "There's a sort of circuit in our brain. Squeezing our left fist activates the right half of our brain which makes us think more creatively," she says. Hey, if it means seeing some fresh colours in the big picture, it's worth a try, OK?

Bright spark: Dr Amantha Imber, above, is full of ideas to inspire creative thinking.
Put up an image or a series of things that break the rules (below). A photo of something that's different to the norm – graffiti, an eccentric fiction character or an odd-one-out image are more likely to promote divergent thinking.



GET STIMULATED

Dr Amantha Imber's top 10 tips for a more creative life:

- Imagine yourself on a hot date. We often have to demonstrate creativity when it comes to attracting a potential partner and inviting them to something other than done-to-death dinner-and-a-movie combination.
- Put an Apple logo above your desk. Most people associate Apple with innovation, so seeing the logo can trigger creative thoughts.
- Surround yourself with warm colours. Reds, oranges and yellows relax us and promote more creative thinking.
- Put up a picture of something natural. We associate rainforests and beaches with creativity, so these images will relax us and make us more creative.
- Raise your eyebrows. People who raise their eyebrows for a few minutes when they're doing a challenging task generate more original ideas than those who don't.
- Play video games. Even if you don't win, they increase our energy levels and make us feel happy, which boosts creativity.
- Clench your left fist for two minutes. This triggers the right-hand side – or creative side – of the brain.
- Do a crossword. Crosswords can take your mind off the task at hand, which at the same time encourages subconscious thoughts about it. When you go back to the original idea you'll have a new take on it.
- Set yourself artificial constraints. By setting yourself new boundaries, say doing a presentation without Powerpoint, you'll be forced to think more creatively.