

Daydream believer

Let your mind wander for a dose of creativity, courage and clarity

Sparks flow when Wendy dreams of Tom Hardy

WORDS PENNY CARROLL PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES

HOW AWESOME IS YOUR MIND.

At any given time, you could be relaxing on a tropical island, sipping a fresh coconut and watching sunlight sparkle on crystal clear water, without even so much as putting on a bikini. A juicy daydream can take you around the world, promote you to CEO or conjure up your perfect partner – and the best part is, making regular visits to fantasy land will give your real life a boost.

You might get a case of the gulfs when your brain takes off to another planet, but letting your mind wander is actually one of the best ideas you never had. It happens naturally – around 47 per cent of our waking hours is spent on daydreaming, according to a Harvard study – and despite what your school teachers might have told you (over and over), it's an essential and helpful part of everyday life.

"Daydreaming is our most creative state of mind," says Amy Fries, author of *Daydreams at Work: Wake Up Your Creative Powers* (Capital Books, \$9.95). "It helps us to visualise goals, to problem solve and to get in touch with our deepest longings. We use daydreams to soothe, amuse and motivate ourselves – they're a tremendous source of energy and inspiration."

*Head on a holiday

Although it's often considered lazy or a waste of time, daydreaming is actually the opposite: research suggests that when your mind is preoccupied conjuring up a picture of Zac Efron's abs, other areas of your noggin are hard at work finding a solution to your most pressing problems.

"When we're daydreaming, we are tapping into the most complex regions

showing that a little mental getaway could be all you need to spark a bright idea.

The other major role daydreaming plays? It's the perfect platform for mapping out your path in life, and finding the courage to make those goals happen.

"Daydreams appear to play the role of helping us to navigate challenges, achieve, learn from experience and be who we want to be," explains WF psychologist Dr. Lissa Johnson. "Research suggests that we daydream most when we are experiencing concerns and demands in important areas of our lives, such as finishing a degree, starting a new job or looking for a relationship."

Your daydreams help you get your goals over the line because they keep the end result – and the benefits attached to it – in sight. "It helps you create a blueprint of where you want to go and how you want to do it," says Fries. "One of the hallmarks of daydreaming is that it's spontaneous, but you can use visualisation to create the reality you want to happen and rehearsal for the outcome you want."

If you're unsure about settling on a looming decision, taking note of where your mind wants to go when it's un tethered could provide valuable insight – so pause and let your thoughts stray. "Daydreams contain important information about what really matters to you," says Dr. Johnson. "Examining your daydreams for goal-related themes, then, can enhance clarity around what you really want."

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of the brain, into stores of knowledge and experience that are unavailable to us when we are locked in the tunnel vision of focus," explains Fries.

Similar to how sleeping provides a much-needed rest for your body and brain, daydreaming appears to be the time-out that your head needs when it's under pressure – only much quicker and more convenient than a nap. In a study from the University of California, students who were allowed to briefly daydream after being given a creativity test scored significantly better on the same task just 12 minutes later than those who were asked to focus their attention during the break.

STAY MINDFUL

Think fit

At a glance, the meditation technique mindfulness seems completely at odds with daydreaming – after all, it's about being in the present, not following your thoughts down the proverbial rabbit hole. But Fries says the two go hand in hand. "I'm a big fan of mindfulness," she says. "We can feel bombarded by boring or negative thoughts so being able to turn off that tidal wave and come back to the present moment is an important tool. When you can turn off the bad thoughts, you can open your mind up – both to the present moment and to more creative, positive daydreams."

we don't have the time to let our minds wander," Fries says. "Driving, walking, taking a shower – these mindless tasks are prime time for mind wandering. Pay attention to what ideas come to you and write them down."

If you want to be more creative, Dr. Johnson suggests, "Adopt an attitude of experimentation in your mental meanderings. Piece something in your mind's eye – an image, a concept, a situation – and just watch it. Be an adventurer in the landscape of your mind."

Got a big goal on your vision board? Make your daydreams vivid, detailed and realistic, advises Dr. Johnson. "Productive daydreams enrich and augment life, rather than avoid it," she says. "Goal-directed daydreams, for instance, should be optimistic and motivating, but reality-based to foster real-life action and effort. Daydreaming about goals that feel unattainable can dampen rather than boost your motivation."

Most daydreams are enjoyable to mull over but there's always potential for fantasies to detour to the dark side. Rumination on scenarios, imagining catastrophes or getting stuck on guilt are warning signs that your daydreams might be more of a hindrance than help. Your job, say our experts, is to make a conscious effort to steer your mind back to more constructive, positive paths.

"If your mind takes you to destructive places, gently bring it back, over and over again, if necessary," says Dr. Johnson. "Just don't shut out those flights of fancy altogether – it's pretty hard to override on positive daydreams."

"Imagining something good, creative, inspiring, motivating or something that leads you to an 'aha' moment – I don't see how you could have too much of that," says Fries. Dream on. 