The benefits of daydreaming

<https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_cox_the_benefits_of_daydreaming/transcript?subtitle=en>

On a daily basis, you spend between a third and half your waking hours daydreaming. That may sound like a huge waste of time, but scientists think it must have some purpose, or humans wouldn’t have evolved to do so much of it. So to figure out what's going on here, let’s take a closer look at the mind-wanderer in chief: the bored teenager.

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Wouldn’t it be cool to discover something, anything. Like even this plant. Just to be one of those explorers who sails around drawing stuff for years on end and everyone thinks they’re a genius. But does anyone even do that anymore? Is there anything left to discover? And would I be tough enough to deal with the dysentery or scurvy or piranhas or whatever? I barely have the endurance to make it through track practice... but I will. Any day now, I’ll have the discipline to show up before sunrise and practice. I’ll win all my races. Winning will become so easy, I’ll pick up other events just for fun. And once I'm in the Olympics, they’ll have no choice but to crown me team captain, which I will graciously accept. And will I be nasty to the teammate who yelled at me? No. I’ll just calmly say, “hope you’re in a better mood.”

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Okay. Yours and other people's daydreams might sound or feel something like that. Let's see what was going on. To see what parts of the brain are active when you’re doing a task, or thinking, or daydreaming, scientists use brain imaging techniques that show increased blood flow and energy expenditure in those areas.

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These brain areas are active, working together and communicating with each other. Taken together, they're called the executive network. When your mind starts to wander, a different set of brain areas becomes active. These areas make up the default mode network. The name default mode makes it sound like nothing is going on. And in fact, for many years, scientists associated this pattern of activity with rest. But a closer look reveals that these are the brain areas involved when we revisit a memory, when we think about our plans and hopes, and yes, when our minds are wandering off on a wild daydream. The mind can wander to unproductive or distressing places and brood over negative past events, like an argument. It can also wander to neutral, everyday matters, like planning out the rest of one's afternoon. But where mind-wandering really gets interesting is when it crosses into the realm of free-moving associative thought that you aren’t consciously directing. This kind of mind-wandering is associated with increases in both ideas and positive emotions, and the evidence suggests that daydreaming can help people envision ways to reach their goals and navigate relationships and social situations.

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Scientists think there may be two essential parts to this process: a generative phase of free-flowing ideas and spontaneous thoughts, courtesy of the default mode network, followed by a process of selecting, developing, and pursuing the best ideas from that generative burst, driven by logical thinking thanks to the executive network. A host of imaging studies suggest that these two networks working in sync is a crucial condition for creative thinking. Taken together, the evidence clearly suggests the logical realm of the executive network and the imaginative realm of the default mode network are closely related. And as you can see, the executive network is still playing a role when the default mode network is doing its thing during daydreaming.

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In teenagers, the prefrontal cortex and other areas involved in executive function are still developing, but teens are perfectly capable of thinking through their problems and goals, especially when given space to do so on their own.

Public Address for Fathers Day

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/15/weekly-address-celebrating-fathers-day-weekend>

Hi, everybody. This Sunday is Father’s Day, and so I wanted to take a moment to talk about the most important job many of us will ever have – and that’s being a dad.

Today we’re blessed to live in a world where technology allows us to connect instantly with just about anyone on the planet.  But no matter how advanced we get, there will never be a substitute for the love and support and, most importantly, the presence of a parent in a child’s life.  And in many ways, that’s uniquely true for fathers.

I never really knew my own father.  I was raised by a single mom and two wonderful grandparents who made incredible sacrifices for me.  And there are single parents all across the country who do a heroic job raising terrific kids.  But I still wish I had a dad who was not only around, but involved; another role model to teach me what my mom did her best to instill – values like hard work and integrity; responsibility and delayed gratification – all the things that give a child the foundation to envision a brighter future for themselves.

That’s why I try every day to be for Michelle and my girls what my father was not for my mother and me.  And I’ve met plenty of other people – dads and uncles and men without a family connection – who are trying to break the cycle and give more of our young people a strong male role model.

Being a good parent – whether you’re gay or straight; a foster parent or a grandparent – isn’t easy.  It demands your constant attention, frequent sacrifice, and a healthy dose of patience.  And nobody’s perfect.  To this day, I’m still figuring out how to be a better husband to my wife and father to my kids.

And I want to do what I can as President to encourage marriage and strong families.  We should reform our child support laws to get more men working and engaged with their children.  And my Administration will continue to work with the faith and other community organizations, as well as businesses, on a campaign to encourage strong parenting and fatherhood.

Because if there’s one thing I’ve learned along the way, it’s that all our personal successes shine a little less brightly if we fail at family.  That’s what matters most.  When I look back on my life, I won’t be thinking about any particular legislation I passed or policy I promoted.  I’ll be thinking about Michelle, and the journey we’ve been on together.  I’ll be thinking about Sasha’s dance recitals and Malia’s tennis matches – about the conversations we’ve had and the quiet moments we’ve shared.  I’ll be thinking about whether I did right by them, and whether they knew, every day, just how much they were loved.

That’s what I think being a father is all about.  And if we can do our best to be a source of comfort and encouragement to our kids; if we can show them unconditional love and help them grow into the people they were meant to be; then we will have succeeded.

Happy Father’s Day to all the dads out there, and have a great weekend.

**Gender Equality**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIwU-9ZTTJc&ab_channel=EnglishSpeeches>

I was appointed as Goodwill Ambassador for UN Women six months ago. And, the more I spoke about feminism, the more I realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop.

For the record, feminism by definition is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of political, economic and social equality of the sexes.

I started questioning gender-based assumptions a long time ago. When I was 8, I was confused for being called bossy because I wanted to direct the plays that we would put on for our parents, but the boys were not. When at 14, I started to be sexualized by certain elements of the media. When at 15, my girlfriends started dropping out of sports teams because they didn’t want to appear muscly. When at 18, my male friends were unable to express their feelings.

I decided that I was a feminist, and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Women are choosing not to identify as feminists. Apparently, I’m among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, and anti-men. Unattractive, even.

Why has the word become such an uncomfortable one? I am from Britain, and I think it is right I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decisions that will affect my life. I think it is right that socially, I am afforded the same respect as men.

But sadly, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to see these rights. No country in the world can yet say that they achieved gender equality.

# Do you really need 8 hours of sleep every night?

[https://www.ted.com/talks/jen\_gunter\_do\_you\_really\_need\_8\_hours\_of\_sleep\_every\_night/transcriptom\_collection.content.click&vd\_source=1a80c0ec0db6e1bbc88298db491d3248](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1V54y1B72a/?spm_id_from=333.1007.top_right_bar_window_custom_collection.content.click&vd_source=1a80c0ec0db6e1bbc88298db491d3248)

Sleep is so important. We need it to live. And when we can't sleep, we're desperate for help.

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[Body Stuff with Dr. Jen Gunter]

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But lately, our fascination with sleep feels as if it's taken on an urgency. Do a quick internet search for sleep and you'll find a slew of articles about how to make your sleep perfect. New gadgets, fancy alarm clocks, stay away from blue light. There are lots of services, products and advice columns that tell us we're sleeping wrong. Not enough, not quality sleep, wrong position. Even worse, you might find scary messaging claiming that if you're not sleeping right your life is going to be shorter, you're going to get all kinds of diseases.

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One of the biggest worries we have about our sleep is that we're not getting enough and that anything less than seven hours a night means that we’re doomed to bad health, everything from high blood pressure to Alzheimer’s disease. But there are two flaws with this kind of messaging. The first flaw is that it's not completely accurate. Seven to eight hours of sleep, while recommended for adults, is just an average. And while messages have to be simplified for health communication to the public, sometimes important nuances get lost. So yes, it's true that not getting enough sleep in the long term is associated with health problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression. But fixating solely on seven to eight hours ignores the fact that there's a range of sleep that people need. The duration of a good night's sleep can be different for different people. Some adults need eight, but some are just fine on six.

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The second flaw with this kind of doomsday messaging is that it can be counterproductive, especially for people who do have trouble sleeping. For instance, in 2019, it was estimated that 21 percent of adults in the US were wearing sleep tracking devices. And that number is probably growing. And I get it. It's fascinating to see how much sleep you've gotten each night and to know what part of your night was spent in deep sleep or dreaming. But having all of that sleep data is causing some people to become obsessed with it, so much so that it’s leading to a condition some call orthosomnia: a preoccupation with the constant need to achieve perfect sleep. And this condition, ironically, is causing more sleep problems.

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Now orthosomnia might be an extreme example, but the anxiety of not getting enough sleep is keeping some of us up at night. So here's what some experts are saying. Stop fixating on the number because that can lead to unrealistic expectations of sleep. According to Dr. Colleen Carney, a psychologist and the head of the Ryerson University Sleep Lab, the basic questions you should ask yourself are: Do I feel reasonably well-rested during the day? Do I generally sleep through the night without disturbances? Or, if I wake, do I fall back asleep easily? Can I stay awake through the day without involuntarily falling asleep? If your answers are yes to all three, you probably don't need to worry about your sleep. And if you're struggling with your sleep, instead of buying expensive blue light filters or fancy sleep trackers, try talking with your doctor to make sure there aren't any medical conditions that need to be explored first. Then try evidence-based recommendations laid out by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. What's really cool is that there's a highly effective therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, or CBT-I, It doesn’t have any medications involved. And it has a really low failure rate.

# How your sense of smell helps you savor flavor

<https://www.ted.com/talks/jen_gunter_how_your_sense_of_smell_helps_you_savor_flavor/transcript>

In a recent survey, a majority of respondents picked their sense of smell as the one they'd be most willing to give up among the traditional five senses. But if you love food, you should be giving your nose much more credit. Because it’s actually our sense of smell that plays a huge role in our ability to process flavor.

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[Body Stuff with Dr. Jen Gunter]

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First, let's talk about how smell works, from coffee to stinky trash. The substances around us give off volatiles, which you can think of as tiny smell molecules. We breathe in these smell molecules, which then stimulate the olfactory sensory neurons that sit high in the nose. Each of these neurons contains an odor receptor on its surface. Once the odor receptors are triggered by these smell molecules, the neurons send information about them to the brain.

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Here's what I think is so cool. The brain not only categorizes that information as a particular odor, it may also begin to associate feelings, like pleasure or disgust and other moods and emotions with that odor for future reference.

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For example, you sniff bacon, you eat it, your taste buds get salt, and then your body gets a whack of fat, which is an energy source. So the brain loves it and attaches a positive label to it. The next time you smell bacon, a sensation associated with pleasure arises.

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Now, there are a lot of smells out there, more than our 400 or so odor receptors can detect. But people with a healthy working sense of smell have odor receptors that can combine to detect anywhere between 10,000 to more than a trillion different odors.

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Now, taste is completely different. It comes from taste receptors on our tongues and in our mouths. Taste is limited to the basics: salty, sweet, bitter, sour and, somewhat controversially, umami or savory. You can taste without smell, but anyone with a stuffy nose can attest that's a pretty bland experience. That's because when we eat, for example, chewing pizza, the pizza releases volatiles that travel from our mouths and throat up through the nasal passage. There, olfactory neurons get all the complex smells from the pizza and send that information to the brain. The smell and taste work together to help us enjoy food. When our nose isn't working properly and food seems flavorless, it's because we're only tasting those basic tastes without any of the complex odors detected through smell.

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So the next time you savor an amazing flavor, thank your nose. Our sense of smell is what brings nuance to what we eat.