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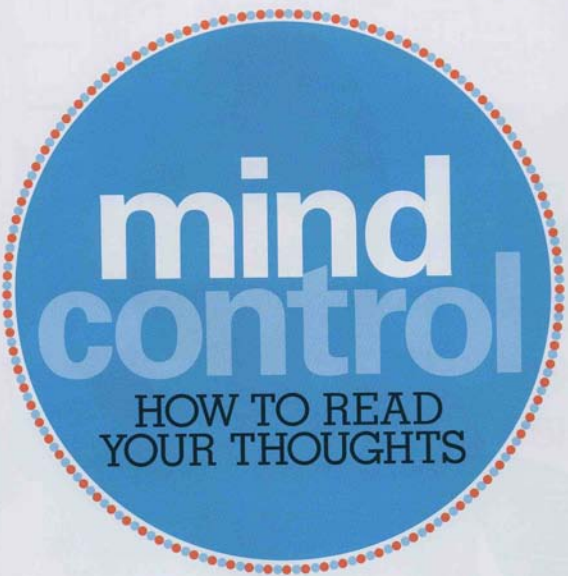
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mind control

HOW TO READ YOUR THOUGHTS

Are you a daydreamer? As Sarah Marinos discovers, you can turn that into an asset by homing in on your thinking

Most of us have a wayward mind, says Guy Claxton, Professor of Learning Science at the University of Bristol, in the UK.

"We all have experiences where we feel the mind has gone walkabout," he says. "Sometimes that's a nice experience and sometimes it

isn't. You can't get a tune out of your head, ideas pop into your head from nowhere, and you know someone has walked into a room even though your eyes are closed.

"These wayward thoughts can be disconcerting for some people. They remind us we are less in charge, but maybe the waywardness is there for a purpose."

So how can you make the most of your wayward mind?



CULTIVATE THE CORNERS

Often as you fall asleep a corner of your mind watches those rampant thoughts. "In those half-awake moments, problems may become more lucid," says Professor Claxton. "Sometimes



your mind will come up with rubbish, but at other times, it comes up with ideas that are useful and creative. In our culture we've learned to draw up a list of pros and cons if we have a difficult decision to make – but you can still make bad decisions with that list. Allow your intuition and feelings to surface and you might make better choices.”



WAKE UP SLOWLY

Try to hang in the space between waking and sleeping for a few minutes and remember what you see. It could be what's most on your mind. “You're eavesdropping on your mind's playtime, similar to when people meditate,” says Professor Claxton. “You're aware but not so much in control that you restrict your thinking.”



DO A MINI MEDITATION

During the day, close your eyes, take three deep breaths and let your mind and body go soft. Stress eases away, if only for a while. During the day our mind and body become tightly wound if we don't take small breaks. If you have to, go to the toilet, shut the door and breathe. ▶

mind control #4

VALUE IDEAS TIME

Recognise where and when you get your better ideas. Is it after the kids have gone to bed? Is it in the shower or is it on your way to work?

"What puts you in that creative state of reverie?" asks Professor Claxton. "We think we have to rush and do the next thing, but that drifting time is intelligent time.

"We make ourselves less smart if we don't value those times in the day."

mind control #5

POST YOUR PROBLEMS

If you have a problem on your mind you can't deal with at that moment, post it into your unconscious and deal with it later – in your most productive, creative time.

"Take an inventory of the things that are troubling you," says Professor Claxton.

"When something bubbles up, take time to think about it. Then acknowledge it and say, 'Okay, I know you're there. I'm not ignoring you and I'll give you 10 minutes before I go to bed or in the shower'. That problem then stops bugging you."

mind control #6

PLAY WITH ODD THOUGHTS

"We live in a society that thinks it has to understand everything, but odd thoughts are not dangerous or hurtful," says Professor Claxton. "See them as amusing, like a child roaming around the house repeating swear words."

mind control #7

ASK YOURSELF FOR ADVICE

If you have a problem, ask yourself for advice, then listen to what your body tells you. "Allow something to develop – a feeling of tightness in your chest or your breath becomes shallow," says Professor Claxton. "Pay attention to your body and you'll get a fresh angle on the problem."

mind control #8

GO FOR A WALK

Take regular strolls at a park, the beach or the countryside. "Nature is such a powerful stimulant for developing a more relaxed attitude



of mind," says Professor Claxton. "It draws us back into a natural environment and puts you back in touch with your physical body."

mind control #9

ENJOY THE SHOW

We all have weird and wonderful things we'd like to do or say. We can enjoy those ideas and dreams – but we don't have to act on them if they're going to hurt ourselves or those around us.

"We all have a two-year-old inside us. We fancy the wrong people, think bad things and get irritable," says Professor Claxton. "Lighten up and simply decouple what is going on inside – and what you act out in the real world. You can't always grab the last bit of cake."

mind control #10

SHARE ZANY THOUGHTS

Up to 20 per cent of people engage in mind chatter or have conversations with themselves but few people are prepared to admit these experiences.

"We wonder what people would think of us if they knew what went on in our mind," says Professor Claxton. "So we develop an anxious and antagonistic attitude to something that could be quite helpful. We draw a tight boundary between normal and sensible, and mad. Perhaps we should relax and share some of those zanier thoughts with people we know."