

You are basking on a tropical island, serenaded by gentle calypso music. An incredibly handsome personal servant is at your side, and a call on your private hot line has just confirmed that you have won a Nobel prize. Sighing contentedly, you reach for your piña colada—only to find your hand submerged in dirty dishes, the children fighting and the dog gnawing on a dining room chair.

Although reality keeps rearing its ugly head, those few minutes of daydreaming bliss were not wasted.

New studies show that putting your head in the clouds now and then can have surprising benefits. According to psychologists, daydreaming can relieve the boredom of a humdrum job, help you find solutions to nagging problems and enhance your sex life.

"Daydreaming increases the variety of the experiences we have during the day, which, in turn, can improve the quality of our lives," says Michael Ascher, Ph.D.,

children, Rhue says, it's likely we will continue to have wandering minds as adults.

A SIGN OF GENIUS? It used to be thought that people given to daydreaming were lazy, crazy or otherwise maladjusted. Now it has been documented that people who fantasize a lot may actually have special personality strengths. In a series of tests, daydreamers proved far superior to the average person in the ability to create vivid images. In fact, writers and artists often use daydreams as part of the creative process.

Behind that dazed, faraway look, daydreamers often brim with creativity, because their thoughts are not constrained by the bounds of reality. They are likely to be thoughtful, easy to get along with and able to handle frustration well; not surprisingly, they make good hypnotic subjects. Also, women who fantasize regularly during sex were found to be as well adjusted as those who do not, and in many cases enjoyed sex somewhat more.

There is reason to take heart if you are in the super-daydreamer category. Some of the world's greatest minds, from composer Wolfgang Mozart to physicist Albert Einstein—were frequently struck with thoughts that ultimately led to monumental discoveries and creations. The story goes that Archimedes, the famous Greek mathematician and scientist, came up with one of his most brilliant equations while soaking in a tub!

HOW DAYDREAMS HELP. A head-in-the-clouds habit can be a true asset. Happier thoughts routinely help us cope with circumstances that are less than perfect. Through sexual fantasies, we can satisfy the desire for Robert Redford without hurting the man we are with. At work we can dream ourselves into Employee of the Year when our supervisors neglect to praise us.

Even if we can't make our fantasies come true, it sure is fun to indulge in them. Some psychotherapists, including Ascher, prescribe daydreaming as a remedy for reducing tension or boredom during the day. "If your job is too stressful, it may help to imagine you're somewhere else. It can be like a two-minute vacation," Ascher suggests.

Klinger points out that daydreaming is a wonderful vehicle for "constructive brainstorming," whether you're planning a party or plotting to ask the boss for a raise. "In a daydreaming state, we're far more likely to work out problems creatively," he claims. "We learn from reviewing past situations or thinking about the future while ironing, walking or shaving." During free-flowing mental side trips, he continues, "our minds are not limited to traditional solutions."

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Some call them
a waste of time, but
daydreams can
have benefits that
may surprise you

DAYDREAMS

a professor
in the Department of
Psychiatry at Temple University
Hospital in Philadelphia.

In addition to cheering us up or making dreary tasks go faster, we gain insight from our daydreams, says Eric Klinger, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota at Morris and Minneapolis. "Daydreaming is also a way of keeping our minds active when what we're doing requires less than our full attention," he adds.

WHO DOES IT? In short, who doesn't do it? Daydreaming is free, requires no advance planning and adds nothing to your cholesterol count. Children like to imagine they are parents, and adults like to dream of being kids.

Corporate executive or street cleaner, we all do it.

Indeed, Klinger's research indicates that about one third of the average person's waking day is spent in "involuntary thought." It's a natural way to use our brains more efficiently, he says. Typically, we'll see or hear something that will bring back a meaningful memory, a difficult situation or an unresolved conflict. By dreaming about it, we may find a solution. According to Judith Rhue, Ph.D., a psychologist at the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Ohio University in Athens, people who daydream frequently often were encouraged as youngsters to use their imagination. Growing up in a lonely environment could spur a daydreaming habit, she says. So could living in an abusive environment in which make-believe was used as an escape. If we fantasize often as

What They Tell Us About Ourselves

BY EVE GLICKSMAN

