

THE BENEFITS OF BOREDOM

Why doing nothing could actually be doing everything to recharge your mind and body

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The actress got so bored during lockdown she turned to watching her washing machine spin.



With endless entertainment, food and even dating options at our fingertips thanks to smartphones, it's seldom we find ourselves without something to occupy us. As a result, our experiences with boredom are fleeting. We might feel the panic begin to build when episodes of our latest Netflix binge run out, or as we wait for our latest love match to reply, but it's rarely more than a few moments. Modern society has led us to believe boredom is something to avoid at all costs, but science suggests the contrary is true.

BOREDOM CAN SPARK CREATIVITY

At its core, boredom is the result of a lack of stimulation, says Dr Amy Silver, psychologist and author of *The Loudest Guest*.

"It can occur when we're not stretched by what is required of us or not stimulated enough to pull us into a stronger emotion," she says.

And it's in this state that brilliance can strike. A 2018 study found that those who completed a boredom-inducing task first, like copying numbers from a phone book, outperformed those who didn't do the task when it came to generating ideas for the use of a pair of plastic cups.

Experts agree that because there's no external stimulation, our mind looks inwards in an attempt to create its own stimulation by way of imagination. "Because we have more space, we're potentially able to wonder more, stay curious and be open to unseen patterns," explains Dr Silver.

IT CAN HELP YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

When we experience boredom, our brains are basically put on "pause", says Dr Silver, who adds that allowing your mind to have a break and take a breather from the hyper-stimulated world we live in can provide much-needed respite. "The very space caused by boredom can be the only time the brain is in peace, allowing reflection and rest, literally recharging and preparing for the next stimulation."

Being still and in the present can also be an opportunity to engage with mindfulness, and fully experience the moment you're in – rather than scrolling Instagram on autopilot.

"Some people can use boredom as a driver to deepen their attention towards the detail in their task," says Dr Silver. "To become mindful is, in essence, becoming full in your mind with one thing."

DON'T FIGHT BOREDOM – JUST OWN IT!

In today's busy world, it's no secret that doing nothing has a bad reputation, but Dr Silver believes it's something we should learn to appreciate.

"When we fear boredom, we tend to over-stimulate ourselves. We suffer with FOMO and we take on too much," she says. "We can also misinterpret boredom as being closer to sadness than it actually is."

Dr Silver suggests looking at what habits you have, and what actions you leap to, when you feel the first pang of boredom. "Do you reach for your phone, your fridge door or your remote control?" she says. "Do these things serve you in the long-term, or just act as an immediate avoidance to boredom?"

Learning to embrace doing nothing and instead viewing it as an opportunity to let your brain recharge, get creative and reflect, can go a long way.

"Don't be frightened of boredom, it could just save your mind," says Dr Silver.

EMBRACE THE QUIET TIME

Learning to get comfortable with difficult emotions takes practice. Dr Silver suggests these three ways of incorporating meaningful boredom into your life ...

1. TAKE A MINDFUL WALK

Go for a solo stroll with no podcasts or music, just you and your thoughts.

2. DO SOMETHING REPETITIVE

Doing a mundane, everyday task such as cleaning is a great way to get comfortable with switching off.

3. SIMPLY SIT

Make time to relax without any stimulation, so you can focus on mindfulness.



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