

Home » Health » Excessive daydreaming linked to obsessive-compulsive symptoms

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Maladaptive Daydreaming is associated with a range of clinical symptoms, including anxiety and depression, as well as negative emotions like guilt. Image: Shutterstock

Stopping the runaway train: Research provides first steps toward treatment guidelines for little-studied “Maladaptive Daydreaming.”

— By Tanya Strevens, Frontiers science writer

Almost everyone **daydreams**. However, daydreaming can become so intense and frequent that it impairs daily functioning, leads to distress and is a cause for medical concern. The first study to explore daily symptoms and **emotions** experienced with such excessive daydreaming reveals it is linked to obsessive-compulsive symptoms and increased negative emotions. These findings, published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, offer hope of eventual treatment guidelines for those struggling to control their daydreaming.

Trapped in a Daydream: Daily Elevations in Maladaptive Daydreaming Are Associated With Daily Psychopathological Symptom

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“Many excessive daydreamers are enormously grateful to find out that what they experience has a name, but we still don’t know how to help them,” explains **Dr. Nirit Soffer-Dudek** from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. “In order to devise treatment guidelines we need to understand this condition better and for that we need rigorous research which focuses on daily patterns of symptoms.”

For many people, daydreaming provides a welcome distraction while the mind wanders from reality. Some, however, daydream for hours each day leading to a range of negative feelings including guilt. Excessive daydreaming, or ‘Maladaptive Daydreaming’ as it is currently termed, is also associated with a range of clinical symptoms, including anxiety and **depression**.

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The new research, led by Soffer-Dudek and co-authored by [Prof. Eli Somer](#) from University of Haifa, Israel, aims to unravel some of the complexity between these various symptoms.

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Over a period of 14 days, 77 volunteers kept a daily diary. They had all diagnosed themselves as excessive daydreamers. Before bedtime, participants recorded their responses in an online questionnaire. Questions posed related to daydreaming and also to obsessive-compulsive symptoms, positivity, anxiety and emotions.

Several key findings emerged from the analysis of the daily diaries. First, days with more intensive and frequent daydreaming featured other symptoms such as obsessive-compulsive behavior as well as more negative emotions. This suggests that while daydreaming may be generally considered a fanciful escape from reality, for excessive daydreamers it actually is not a wholly positive experience.

The day after these bouts of daydreaming tended to be difficult for participants in this study, who experienced more obsessive-compulsive symptoms as well as feelings of detachment from reality.

The researchers also discovered that obsessive-compulsive behavior was a consistent predictor of daydreaming behavior; it occurred repeatedly on the days prior to intense daydreaming.

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So, collectively, these findings build a strong body of evidence for a link between obsessive-compulsive symptoms and excessive daydreaming. This is an important link because it suggests that Maladaptive Daydreaming and compulsive behavior may have common features. It also offers some clues about how to help maladaptive daydreamers.

“Our study suggests that Maladaptive Daydreaming may perhaps be alleviated by techniques informed by evidence-based treatment for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. For example, identifying triggers preceding daydreaming and attempting to avoid the daydreaming response or delay it,” says Soffer-Dudek.

Although very little research exists on Maladaptive Daydreaming, it's not completely unknown either. Online forums for people experiencing the symptoms do exist. Indeed, this was one way in which participants were recruited. This means the study results reflect behavior of people who were self-diagnosed and seeking information about their condition. As such Soffer-Dudek concedes that, “perhaps the results cannot be extended to include people who are not actively seeking help with their runaway daydreaming.” This underlines the need for further investigation, to expand scientific understanding of this behavior.

Scientists believe that daydreaming probably has evolutionary benefits such as offering mental breaks, allowing future planning and relieving boredom. But as doctors across many branches of medicine agree, you can have too much of a good thing. This study is a promising step towards devising treatments that could short-circuit unwanted daydreaming.

Original article: [Trapped in a Daydream: Daily Elevations in Maladaptive Daydreaming Are Associated With Daily Psychopathological Symptoms](#)

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