

People spend half their waking hours daydreaming

Adapted from BBC News 02/11/2010 © BBC MMX <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11741350>

People spend nearly half of their waking hours not thinking about what they are actually doing, according to a US study conducted via the iPhone



More than 2,200 volunteers downloaded an app which then surveyed them about their thoughts and mood at **random** times of day and night. The Science study suggested minds wander, even from demanding tasks, at least 30% of the time.

A UK expert said other studies confirm people were easily **distracted**.

The iPhone was a novel research tool for researchers at Harvard University.

Participants agreed to be contacted, at which point they selected what they were doing from a menu, whether they were actually thinking about it, and how happy or sad they felt. Remarkably, some participants were prepared to answer the survey even when making love.

While their study sample was composed entirely of people who owned the device, and were prepared to download and be disturbed by an app of this kind, the researchers said it provides an **insight** into how our minds can wander during the day. After gathering 250,000 survey results, the Harvard team concluded that this group of people spent 46.9% of their time awake with their minds wandering.

Dr Matthew Killingsworth, one of the researchers, said: "Mind-wandering appears **ubiquitous** across all activities. This study shows that our mental lives are **pervaded**, to a remarkable degree, by the non-present."

Happiness

In addition, the survey data on happiness appeared to show a modest connection between the degree of mind-wandering and the level of happiness. People who were most distracted away from the task in hand were more likely to report feelings of unhappiness.

Reports of happiness were most likely among those exercising, having a conversation or making love, whereas unhappiness was reported most while people were resting, working, or using computers.

Dr Killingsworth said: "Mind-wandering is an excellent **predictor** of people's happiness."

However, whether mind-wandering is the cause, or the result of unhappiness is still not proven by the research.

Professor Nilli Lavie, from the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London, said that while any attempt to try to measure the wandering mind was "heroic", the results of the study might be rendered less reliable by the type of participant it attracted.

She said: "Mind-wandering may simply be ubiquitous in the type of person who is engaging in this type of iPhone application, and who is prepared to be **distracted** from whatever they are doing in this way."

However, she said that her own laboratory research had found similar or even higher levels of mind-wandering among subjects given less demanding tasks to complete.

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A. Read the text and then answer the questions

1. How was the survey undertaken?
2. According to the survey for what percentage of time do I minds wander?
3. Why might the survey be considered to be unrepresentative?
4. When were people most likely to report that they were happy?
5. Does the survey tell us whether the unhappiness is caused by mind-wandering?
6. According to Nilli Lavie when might a person show higher levels of mind-wandering?
7. At which university was the research carried out?

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B. Look at the words in the text that are in bold. They are listed on the left below. Now match them with a word on the right that can replace them in the text.

For example **random** can be replaced by arbitrary

random



arbitrary

distracted

seemingly everywhere

predictor

sidetracked

insight

saturated

pervaded

forecast

ubiquitous

indication

C. There are 5 spelling mistakes in the text. Underline the mistakes and then correct them below.

Name _____ Date _____



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D. What are your views on this article? Use the space below to write several paragraphs giving your views.

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A. Read the text and then answer the questions

1. Via an app on iPhone
2. 30%
3. As only those with an iPhone could participate
4. When exercising, having a conversation or making love.
5. No – still not proven
6. When given less demanding tasks
7. Harvard

B. Look at the words in the text that are in bold. They are listed on the left below. Now match them with a word on the right that can replace them in the text.

For example **random** can be replaced by arbitrary

distracted	sidetracked
predictor	indication
insight	forecast
pervaded	saturated
ubiquitous	seemingly everywhere

C. There are 5 spelling mistakes in the text. Underline the mistakes and then correct them below.

participants	should be	participants
activaties	should be	activities
degre	should be	degree
excelent	should be	excellent
laborotory	should be	laboratory