

NEED A CREATIVE SOLUTION? GO FOR A WALK, SAYS SCIENCE

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(Blog: TOM LINE)

Недавние исследования в Стэнфорде показали, что ходьба благотворно влияет на продуктивность некоторых видов умственной деятельности.

As far as we know, there is no specific magic formula for unleashing creativity, no carefully guarded secret sauce. But there are ways to open up the pipes leading to the harder-to-access corners of your imagination, allowing you to better diagnose potential pratfalls and look past environmental limitations. Mental Drano, if you will.

Some methods are a bit counterintuitive: Being sleepy can purportedly make you more creative, and the same goes for having a messy desk. Now new research from Stanford supports one of the more time-tested methods for drumming up new ideas--going for a walk.

Marilyn Oppezzo, a doctoral graduate in education psychology, and Daniel Schwartz, a professor at the Stanford Graduate School of Education, found that walking--whether you're indoors or outdoors--is good for giving the brain a dose of inspiration. We've known for some time that a little aerobic respiration is great for tapping a deeper state of mind; Haruki Murakami, for example, says running or swimming every day is non-negotiable whenever he's writing a novel.

Oppezzo and Schwartz, on the other hand, were most interested in modality. More specifically they wanted to find out whether the change of setting helps get the creative juices flowing, or whether it is the act of moving your legs itself. They designed a set of four experiments to test a variety of real-world scenarios: walking outdoors (a method favored by Silicon Valley types like Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey), walking on a treadmill while facing a boring wall, sitting at a desk, etc. Then, they had subjects take a "divergent

thinking” creativity test, which entailed thinking up alternate uses on a given subject. The more novel or original the solution conjured up (i.e., did anyone else in the group come up with the same answer?) the better.

In this case researchers were amazed to find that, when it came to walking, there was little difference between going for a stroll around campus or walking on a machine. Compared to sitting, walking in any form was shown to boost creativity by some 60%--even when subjects sat down at a desk afterward. “I thought walking outside would blow everything out of the water,” said Oppezzo, “but walking on a treadmill in a small, boring room still had strong results, which surprised me.”

While walking was shown to be a boon for creative brainstorming, it wasn’t beneficial at all for the kind of thinking that required a single, non-negotiable answer. (Perhaps finding that especially tricky line of code, or pinpointing a missing variable. That said, it’s still a good idea to unshackle yourself from your desk every hour.) “We’re not saying walking can turn you into Michelangelo,” said Oppezzo. “But it could help you at the beginning stages of creativity.”