

SURF THE CREATIVE WAVES

Alpha brainwaves can enhance your focus, creativity and ability to get things done

It's late in the day, tomorrow's homework is still lying untouched on the desk and focus is nowhere to be found.

Even after turning off the TV, relocating to a quieter room and putting your phone on silent to avoid being distracted by something more interesting than the task at hand, you still can't seem to get it done.

Whether it's down to a lack of motivation, worry, having no idea where to start or simply feeling tired after a long day, situations like this will likely result in frustration and stress, leaving almost no space for creativity.

These are the times when alpha waves can come to the rescue.

What are alpha waves?

The brain is home to billions of cells called neurons, which are responsible for things such as thinking, feeling, creating and memorising.

To ensure efficiency when doing these tasks, groups of neurons communicate with each other by sending messages, called brainwaves.

There are five different types of these (see overleaf), with alpha being one example.

What do they do?

Alpha waves bring a sense of a beautiful balance. Imagine a feeling of relaxation without sleepiness, soft focus rather

than intense concentration, full involvement in something without feeling stressed.

In other words, alpha waves can bring your attention to what needs to be done by making surrounding stressors – such as noise, self-doubt or lack of interest – fade away.

They can help you get in the zone and refocus on the only thing that's actually important when trying to tick off tasks: doing your very best without wasting any attention or energy on worrying and second-guessing.

Is alpha always the answer?

How helpful these waves are might depend on the type of task that needs to be completed.

According to clinical hypnotherapist Elle Foll: 'Being in an alpha-brainwave state is particularly useful when working on something requiring creativity, for example, writing an English essay or looking for new ways of doing things. However, when revising for a test or solving a maths problem that requires calculation skills, moving into a state of beta brainwaves might be more useful.'

Then again, if you're experiencing any uncomfortable emotions or uncertainty about the maths problem, alpha waves can still be useful in helping to relax and recharge your batteries before trying to tackle the task.

Turn the page for more on alpha brainwaves



How can I channel these brainwaves?

In communicating with each other, neurons create five types of brainwaves at all times, but there's always one that takes the lead, depending on what you're doing or feeling (see opposite page).

For example, for a good night's sleep, the brain will naturally adopt a state of theta and then delta brainwaves. But when you're doing something that requires a soft focus with a sense of ease, such as watching a film, alpha waves are likely to take the lead.

While this is an automatic brain process, meaning it happens without your control, it is possible to influence the dominating waves. Elle says: 'Although the day's rhythm will naturally take you from one state to another, you can also do it yourself.'

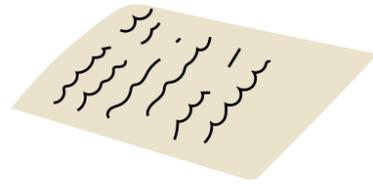
To channel alpha, she suggests closing the eyes and paying attention to the breath for a few moments. You could also ask a guardian to help you find a suitable guided meditation online.

The resulting relaxation will mean that the brain is moving into the alpha-brainwave state – the perfect condition for creativity to flourish.

What if it's still not working?

If, after trying these techniques, the creative spark is still missing, this could be the brain's way of asking for a break. Are you tired or hungry, or do you need a change of activity or environment? All of these things will affect your focus and creativity levels, so a short break may be all that's needed before returning to the task.

When you're ready, consider starting with something small, such as writing down ideas for an essay title, rather



than overwhelming yourself with attempting to create the entire masterpiece in one go.

As illustrator Caroline Ellerbeck says in her book, *Frame Your Imagination*: 'A white sheet of paper often holds you back from starting a drawing, [whereas] a simple square can easily become a swimming pool seen from above, it can also be a window with a view on the mountains.'

It might sound contradictory, but on occasions when time is ticking and creativity and focus are needed but can't easily be found, taking a step back and relaxing might be the most productive thing you can do.

With the help of alpha waves, you can find yourself in a perfectly balanced space, with the feeling of being relaxed and softly focused at the same time, zoning out all the distractions and worries and allowing the creative thoughts to surface.

Once there, you only need to start with a simple square. Then see where it takes you...



A look at the five types of brainwaves

Named after letters of the Greek alphabet, each is best-suited to a different state – here's a rough guide:

Alpha – relaxation and soft focus, leading to creativity.

Beta – strong concentration when solving mental tasks.

Delta – deep sleep.

Gamma – high-level alertness for peak concentration.

Theta – deep relaxation that leads to drifting off to sleep.

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