

Daydream a lot? Feel sluggish? Stare into space? You might have cognitive disengagement syndrome

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Do you find that you daydream a lot? Are you often sluggish and tend to disengage easily when doing a task? You might have cognitive

disengagement syndrome, or CDS.

CDS was first described by psychologists in the [1960s and 1970s](#) when they noticed that some people display these traits more persistently than others. But why is it considered a syndrome rather than just a quirky personality trait?

The distinction lies in the effect. For people with CDS, their behavior significantly interferes with their daily lives, academic performance and social interactions.

While everyone daydreams occasionally, those with CDS find it hard to stay focused on tasks for extended periods. This isn't just about being inattentive or lazy, CDS is a persistent pattern that can disrupt a person's ability to succeed in various areas of life.

Unlike [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) (ADHD), which includes hyperactivity and impulsivity, CDS is characterized by its "[sluggish cognitive tempo](#)"—an earlier name for the condition.

The condition is not recognized as a distinct "attention disorder" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the standard classification of mental disorders used by professionals in the US. However, the [growing body of research](#) suggests that it deserves more attention and should be looked at separately from ADHD.

A way to look at the two is, if a person has ADHD, they are able to focus on something but they will probably become distracted and switch their focus to something else. If a person has CDS, they are unable to focus in the first place.

How do we identify CDS?

Diagnosis is tricky because there are no official criteria. However, some psychologists use a combination of [questionnaires and behavioral observations](#) to assess symptoms like frequent daydreaming, mental foginess and slow processing speed.

Parents and teachers often report this behavior in children who seem "out of it" or who take longer to respond to questions and complete tasks.

Slow processing speed means that people take longer to take in information, make sense of it and respond. For example, at school a student with slow processing speed may take longer to answer a question or complete an assignment because they need more time to understand the material and think through their response. This isn't due to lack of intelligence or effort—their brain simply processes information at a slower pace.

Support and treatment for CDS are still evolving. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is commonly used to help people develop better ways of coping and improve their focus.

Some researchers are [exploring](#) the use of stimulant drugs, similar to those used for ADHD, but the evidence is still inconclusive.

Lifestyle changes, such as having a more stable sleep routine and incorporating regular exercise, are [also recommended](#) to help manage symptoms.

Lack of awareness

One of the biggest difficulties is the lack of awareness. Many people, including some health care professionals, may dismiss CDS as mere laziness or lack of effort. This stigma can prevent people from seeking

help and receiving the support they need.

Despite the lack of official recognition, it's estimated that CDS may affect a significant portion of the population. Studies suggest that it could be [as common as ADHD](#), which affects around [5%-7% of children](#). This indicates a substantial number of people might be struggling with the symptoms of CDS without even knowing it.

Understanding CDS is crucial because it can help those affected to get the support they need. By recognizing that CDS behavior is not just quirks—or an attempt to show that you are too cool to care—but potential indicators of a broader issue, we can better support people in managing their symptoms and improving their quality of life.

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