Autopilot

What autopilot is, what we miss on it and ways to notice the present.

Have you ever driven a familiar route and arrived with no memory of the journey? Or finished a meal without tasting it? That is autopilot. The body does one thing while the mind is somewhere else.

Autopilot is useful. It lets us tie laces and drive cars without thinking through each step. It becomes a problem when we live most of our lives that way.

What we miss on autopilot

- **Good moments.** They happen, and we do not notice them.
- **Early warning signs.** Tension, tiredness and low mood build unnoticed until they are hard to shift.
- **Choices.** Old habits run by themselves: reaching for the phone, the biscuit, the sharp reply.
- **Other people.** We hear the words but miss how the person is.

Where the mind goes

When attention is not on the present, it usually drifts to worry about the future or to going over the past. Studies suggest the mind wanders for a large part of the day, and that people tend to be less happy when it does, whatever they are doing.

Ways to come off autopilot

Use a bell
Pick an everyday cue, such as a phone ringing, a red light or a door handle, as a reminder to notice where your mind is.

One breath
Feel one whole breath, in and out, with full attention.

Senses
Name three things you can see, hear or feel right now.

Do one thing
For one small task a day, do only that task.

When am I most on autopilot?

What do I tend to miss?

The cue I will use this week to wake up

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