



WORTH THE WAIT

Finding ways to cope with the frustration and boredom of marking time

You're standing in line at the school canteen with your stomach rumbling, watching in frustration as the procession ahead of you creeps forwards at a snail's pace. Or perhaps you're sitting in the waiting room at the dentist's, staring at the clock as the seconds tick by in slow motion and wondering just how long you're going to be stuck there.

Waiting is a common feature of life and it's something that many people find difficult. Some say it makes them feel powerless – there's nothing you can do to make an endless queue at a theme park move faster or the hairdresser be ready for you sooner – and it's understandable to find this lack of control difficult.

Others may feel that time spent waiting is time wasted. Karin Peeters, a London-based psychotherapist with a special interest in mindfulness, says: 'You're constantly being told to be productive, to do something useful, and waiting can therefore be perceived as wasting time.'

When there's so much else you could be doing, it's easy to see why doing nothing is the last thing you'd want to do.

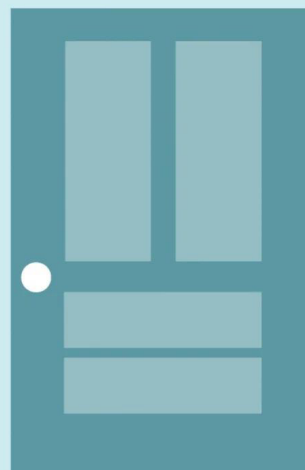
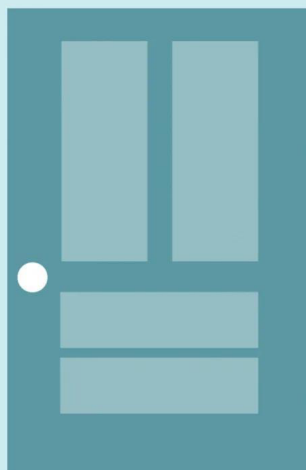
Frustration and boredom are common responses. And a queue that never seems to move or a wait that's longer than expected can activate a stress response. This releases hormones that prime the body for action, and in situations where there's nothing to be done but sit tight, can make people feel annoyed, angry or even claustrophobic.

But whether you're waiting for a train that feels like it will never turn up or shuffling on the spot in line at a shop, the chances are there are lots of times in your week when you find yourself in this situation.

Thankfully, there are ways to make the experience less of a burden (see opposite). Waiting doesn't have to be dull – accept the emotions it stirs up, let your mind wander or find something enjoyable to do. You may be surprised at how much it's possible to value this window of time.

Breathe life into seemingly dead time

Keeping calm and making the most of a long wait isn't always easy – here are five ways to turn boring into bearable



1 Take a breath

'Waiting is like pressing the pause button. It's an opportunity for a rest,' says Karin. 'While waiting, you can take some deep belly breaths in and out through your nose, really letting the belly move outwards when you fill your lungs with air [see issue 41]. When you breathe out, let go of everything that's bothering you. And when you breathe in, imagine a nice colour, or nice feelings, filling you up with loveliness.'

'Taking a moment to breathe mindfully in this way will help you feel calmer.' This can be an especially helpful technique if you're starting to feel stressed or claustrophobic.

2 Practise patience

Waiting often involves relying on other people, and this is where patience comes in. You may be annoyed that the person working at a till seems to be going painfully slowly, or that the doctor is running late. If you find yourself fizzing with frustration at someone else's pace,

taking a moment to pause and accept the situation can be useful for letting go of those feelings.

'Imagine that someone is waiting for you, and you can feel their impatience, their frustration,' says Karin. 'They might even say something unkind like "Hurry up", or "Why are you so slow?". Feels awful, doesn't it? Try not to be like that with others. If you see that they are doing the best they can, then simply relax.'

3 Be mindful

Karin suggests using moments of seeming nothingness to take in the beauty around you. 'Lift your eyes and see the world and really appreciate the many little things you're grateful for, like the sound of birds chirping, the warmth of the sun on your face, your comfy shoes on your feet.'

If you're waiting for the bus, instead of staring up the street or repeatedly checking the time, see what you notice around you. What flowers are growing in the nearby hedgerow?

Even when you're queuing somewhere like a café, there can be interesting things to observe. This can be useful both as a distraction and as a way to be more mindful in the moment.

4 Dare to daydream

You may be so used to keeping busy that waiting gives your mind a welcome chance to wander (see page 2). This breather for the brain could be a chance for creative ideas to come to you or for you to think through a personal project you've not had time to focus on. If you have a notebook, you could jot down some of your free-flowing thoughts.

5 Find the fun

Think in advance about what could keep you occupied. Could you keep a book in your bag, and enjoy getting lost in a novel? If you're waiting with friends, you can still enjoy each other's company – a game or a good conversation makes the time go quicker.

