

LIFE & WELLNESS

Your Brain Jumps to Conclusions—Here’s How to Stop It

Pausing between noticing and reacting changes everything.

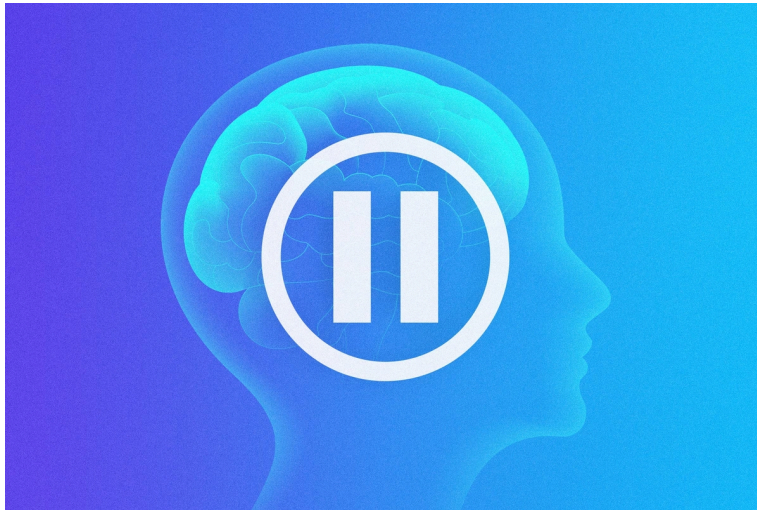


Illustration by The Epoch Times, Shutterstock



Sarah Campise Hallier

3/17/2026 | Updated: 3/17/2026

The cold hits you the moment you step outside. It’s 40 degrees, the wind cuts through your scarf—and there’s your neighbor, walking past in a thin T-shirt like it’s June. Before you’ve taken another step, you’ve already decided something about her.

Maybe it’s “What is she thinking?” or “People are so careless.” Your walk turns into a private lecture about other people’s choices.

There is another way you could see it. Instead of landing on your neighbor, your attention turns inward. You notice the warmth of your own jacket, feel your shoulders relax. “I’m glad I grabbed this on my way out.” Your mind drifts to the closet at home, stuffed with coats you rarely wear, and wonders which ones you could donate to the local shelter.

It’s the same cold sidewalk, the same neighbor in a T-shirt, but an entirely different experience.

Both of those internal dialogues are often considered “judging,” but psychologists draw a sharp distinction between the two. One is quick, harsh, and focused on others. The second is slower, inward-facing, and self-aware. The gap between the two has a name: discernment. It’s the ability to perceive a situation clearly and judge it thoughtfully.

The Fast Mind and the Reflective Mind

Researchers have long known that the brain relies on two primary systems of decision-making—the reactive system, which is impulsive and intuitive, and the reflective system, which is logical and methodical.

A 2025 [paper](#) described intuitive thinking as efficient, but also biased. Instead of slowing down to take in the full picture, it jumps to conclusions based on past experiences or what feels familiar. It is the difference between assuming a friend’s short text means they are upset and later learning they were just busy.

That shortcut served humans well when fast survival decisions were a matter of life or death, but in modern life, that same instinct can lead us astray. A 2025 [study](#), published in *Communications in Psychology* suggests that once we’ve made up our minds about something, we tend to seek out information that confirms

what we already believe and filter out what doesn't. In other words, we stop listening, not because we're incurious, but because certainty feels like an answer.

Discernment works differently. It allows us to weigh our options rather than make assumptions, and to simply observe, rather than constantly feel the need to fix or change something. A 2025 [study](#) found that people perceived slower, more deliberate decision-makers as more intelligent and trustworthy than faster ones, even when both groups reached identical conclusions.

There's also a physical dimension to this. Snap reactions can leave you tense and on edge, while discernment brings a sense of calm and comfort, as if your thoughts and emotions are working together rather than competing.

How Discernment Leads to Better Decisions

We have all been there. A short email from a colleague feels cold, or a stranger's glance on the subway seems disapproving. The mind fills in the blanks before you have all the facts.

"Judgment is usually automatic and evaluative," Barbara Guimaraes, a licensed therapist and founder of Mental Nesting, told The Epoch Times. "It happens quickly, often outside of conscious awareness. The brain is scanning for threat and efficiency, not nuance."

According to Guimaraes, stress can make this pattern worse. When people feel overwhelmed, their thinking becomes sharper and more binary. Experiences are sorted into safe or unsafe, good or bad, and that sorting happens quickly.

Discernment enters at what she calls a "choice point." It's the moment between stimulus and response where, if you're paying attention, something else becomes possible. Maybe your heart is racing, or a flush of heat comes over your cheeks. A defensive thought is forming at that very moment. "Awareness is just noticing what's happening without making it mean anything yet," Guimaraes said. "If you skip straight to evaluation, you usually just react."

That pause may only last a few seconds, but it can be the difference between sending a harsh text or asking a thoughtful, clarifying question.

Mahima Razdan, a psychoanalyst-candidate at the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis in New York City and a hypnotherapist, describes habitual judgment as a form of "splitting," in which people or situations are categorized as all good or all bad. "The mind does this to maintain safety when it feels threatened," she told The Epoch Times. The problem is that the shortcut distorts reality: A capable colleague becomes incompetent after a single mistake, or a friend becomes unreliable after one cancellation.

Keeping the Conversation Open

"Judgment is often emotionally charged and protective," Krista Norris, a licensed family and marriage therapist and owner of Conscious Connection Therapy Services, told The Epoch Times. When a partner forgets an important date, a conversation can curdle before it begins, sparked by a defensive tone, stiff posture, and overall tense vibe. When a coworker disagrees publicly with you in a meeting, judgment can turn that disagreement into opposition, limiting your ability to work together and creatively problem-solve.

Slowing down changes the dynamic. "Immediate judgments come from brain systems tied to threat detection and emotional memory," Norris said. When we deliberately pause, brain regions tied to regulation and perspective-taking become active. The body follows that shift as well. Habitual judging keeps the nervous system on alert, constantly scanning for what's wrong.

Discernment reduces the need to be in defense mode. "It's steadier," Norris says. "It lets you tolerate uncertainty, consider multiple perspectives, and respond proportionately instead of escalating."

The Cost of Constant Judgment

Judgment, when it becomes reflexive, exacts a real cost.

A person who constantly evaluates others and themselves carries that into every interaction. Casual remarks are replayed, minor mistakes feel intense, and every interaction is seen as good or bad. The mind never gets a break from assessing every scenario.

“Judging yourself a lot just adds more stress,” Guimaraes said. “You get tight and start fighting with yourself.”

Over time, this pattern narrows your ability to empathize with others. Rigidity begins to affect your relationships. Conversations stall because both sides feel misread or criticized, Norris said.

When a person practices discernment, connections start to change. Two people can still disagree, but when your mind isn’t constantly ruminating on every difference, it reduces unnecessary conflict. Judgment narrows attention to what feels wrong, while discernment broadens attention to what is relevant.

Cultivating Discernment in Daily Life

Developing discernment begins with a deceptively simple act: noticing a thought before declaring it true.

“Awareness is just observation,” Norris said. “It notices what’s happening without labeling it yet. Evaluation is what comes next.” The space between those two things—noticing and meaning-making—is where discernment lives.

Each expert agreed: Discernment is not a rare personality trait. It develops through small, everyday choices. Often it appears in a simple moment when your impulse says, “decide now.” It’s the internal equivalent of taking a breath before speaking.

“That moment between noticing and meaning-making gives you space to regulate. It’s choosing responsiveness over reactivity, Guimaraes said.

Turning Inward

In a noisy digital age that rewards instant opinions, discernment may be the rare skill that brings back connection.

Next time something triggers a strong reaction, give yourself a few moments before responding. Instead of immediately replying to a message or forming a judgment about someone’s behavior, allow your mind time to stop and think. That distance can make it easier to notice assumptions forming in the background.

It can help to revisit the moment later. What actually happened, and what did your mind add to the story? Writing down the situation or talking it through with someone you trust can make those patterns easier to recognize over time.

“Like any form of self-awareness,” Norris said, “it strengthens with repetition.”

Not everything requires an immediate response or reaction. Sometimes the wisest response is to notice, breathe, and wait a few minutes before responding.



Sarah Campise Hallier
Author

Sarah Campise Hallier, M.A. in administrative leadership, is a staff writer for A Voice for Choice Advocacy and associate editor at Appetito Magazine. Raised on organic vegetables from her mother’s backyard garden, she brings a lifelong interest in clean living to stories on nutrition, environment, and lifestyle.

Author’s Selected Articles

How Both Introverts and Extroverts Bring Unique Strengths

Mar 13, 2026



THC Builds Up in the Body, Influencing Inflammation and Immunity

Feb 16, 2026



Friends Move, Partners Pass: How Older Adults Can Break the Loneliness Loop

Feb 07, 2026



When Brushing Is Not Enough: How Xylitol Changes Oral Health

Jan 17, 2026



EPOCH HEALTH

Mind · Body · Soul



Explore Our Health Newsletters

Get the best in health and wellness. See all of our inspiring newsletter.

CHOOSE YOURS NOW

Newsletters

Rise & Shine

Wellness

Integrative Medicine

Nutrition & Supplements

21-Day Super Immunity Challenge

Essential Guides

Parkinson's Disease

ADHD

Sciatica

Celiac Disease

Vertigo

Macular Degeneration

Original Series

Virtue Medicine

The Roots of Hair Loss

Harnessing Vagus Nerve Power

Herbal First Aid Kit

EMF: The Invisible Hazard

THE CONTENT IN EPOCH HEALTH IS NOT INTENDED TO BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE, DIAGNOSIS OR TREATMENT. NEVER DISREGARD PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE, OR DELAY IN SEEKING IT, BECAUSE OF SOMETHING YOU HAVE READ IN THIS PUBLICATION. NEVER RELY ON INFORMATION IN THIS PUBLICATION IN PLACE OF SEEKING PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL ADVICE. EPOCH HEALTH DOES NOT RECOMMEND OR ENDORSE ANY SPECIFIC TESTS, PRODUCTS, PROCEDURES, OPINIONS OR OTHER INFORMATION THAT MAY BE PROVIDED IN THIS PUBLICATION. [SEE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.](#)

[About Us](#) [Media Statements](#) [Contact Us](#) [Advertising & Partnerships](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [Terms of Services](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) [Copyright Policy](#) [Data Disclaimer](#) [Digital Newspaper](#) [Our Story](#) [Subscribe](#) [Careers](#)

Copyright © 2000 - 2026 The Epoch Times Association Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information