

Facts About Dreaming



1 We all dream every night

Our brains are active throughout the night. But after we wake up, we often don't remember much about our dreams.

2 We dream most vividly during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep

Some of our sleep has vivid, structured thoughts - or dreams. These occur during a stage of sleep that is called REM sleep. REM sleep occurs in short episodes across each night each about 90 minutes apart. Our longer dreams are in the morning hours.

3 We are specially wired not to act out our dreams

During REM sleep many of our muscles relax completely and this prevents us acting out our dreams. If this system doesn't work properly we may try to act out our dreams, especially if the dreams involve strong emotions.

4 Many dreams are bizarre because part of our brain shuts down

When we are awake the front part of our brain controls how we make sense of the world. This shuts down during dreaming. Because of this, the dreaming brain puts together ideas that normally do not go together.

5 Most dreams relate to recent awake experiences

Dreams are often linked to real life events from the past. Usually these are events or thoughts from one to two days before the dream.

6 We dream in pictures

About two thirds of dreams are mainly visual, with fewer that involve sounds, movement, taste or smell. Colour is only in about a third of all dreams. It has been said that when we are awake we think in ideas, but when asleep we think in pictures.

7 We can learn to control our dreams

Many people have bad dreams or nightmares. These can happen over and over again. But people can change the events in these dreams to be less frightening. First, write down memories of the scary dream. After this think about how it might end differently.

8 Scientists disagree about the meaning of dreams

Some people say our dreams mean nothing. They say we have them only because parts of our brain are stimulated when we sleep. Other people say dreams have value. They say it is a kind of therapy for when we're feeling down. Having and remembering vivid dreams about stressful things in our lives may help deal with stress. Many people think that dreams contain messages, but the evidence for this is weak.

This information is produced by:

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The peak national association of clinicians and scientists devoted to investigation of sleep and its disorders

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