

# Your life really does flash before your eyes before you die, study suggests



Researchers said the parts of the brain which store memory were the last affected by trauma such as oxygen or blood loss CREDIT: ALAMY

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Your life really does flash before your eyes when you die, a study suggests - with the parts of the brain that store memories last to be affected as other functions fail.

Research on those who have had "near death" experiences suggests that the phenomenon rarely involves flashbacks in chronological order, as happens in Hollywood films.

Participants said that there was rarely any order to their life memories and that they seemed to come at random, and sometimes simultaneously.

**A representation of life-events as a continuum exists in the cognitive system, and may be further expressed in extreme conditions of psychological and physiological stress**

Often, the mind played tricks - with people reliving their own experiences from the point of view of others who had been involved.

The study found that many of the flashbacks involved intensely emotional moments.

Researchers from Hadassah University in Jerusalem analyzed seven accounts of such experiences, obtained from in-depth interviews.

These were to devise a questionnaire which was sent out to 264 other people who gave detailed responses of their experiences.

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The idea that life flashes in front of a person has featured in countless works of literature and film.

But there has been limited research to explain what the phenomenon involves.

Researchers said the new study shines a light on "a most intriguing mental phenomenon that fascinated humans from time immemorial" - which they coined "life review experience" (LRE).

Those involved in the study said they lost all sense of time, with memories flying back at them from all periods of their life.

One wrote: "There is not a linear progression, there is lack of time limits... It was like being there for centuries. I was not in time/space so this question also feels impossible to answer.

"A moment, and a thousand years... both and neither. It all happened at once, or some experiences within my near-death experience were going on at the same time as others, though my human mind separates them into different events".

Another common feature were extremely emotional experiences - often from somebody else's point of view. One respondent said: "I could individually go into each person and I could feel the pain that they had in their life... "I was allowed to see that part of them and feel for myself what they felt".

Another said: 'I was seeing, feeling these things about him (my father), and he was sharing with me the things of his early childhood and how things were difficult for him'. Every person in the study said they were left with a new perspective on their life events and on significant people in their lives.

Researchers said that the phenomenon could be caused by the parts of the brain that store autobiographical memories like the prefrontal, medial temporal, and parietal cortices.

Those parts of the brain are not susceptible to oxygen and blood loss during serious injuries, meaning they are one of the last brain functions to suffer.

The study, published in the journal *Consciousness and Cognition*, concludes: "Re-experiencing one's own life-events, so-called LRE, is a phenomenon with well-defined characteristics, and its sub-components may be also evident in healthy people.

"This suggests that a representation of life-events as a continuum exists in the cognitive system, and may be further expressed in extreme conditions of psychological and physiological stress".

Previous studies have suggested that the phenomenon is more common among those with a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the breath and arteries following a cardiac arrest.