



I'm not robot



Next

What is it called to control your dreams

Lucid dreamers are those lucky individuals who are aware that they're dreaming and are able to control what happens in their dreams. (Jump off a cliff and soar through the air? Sure. Walk across the ocean? Go for it!) It's an ability that must make the dreaming hours more interesting, and now some new research suggests some waking-life benefits, too. Lucid dreamers tend to be better at problem-solving, particularly the types of problems that require one of those lightbulb-flashing-on bursts of insight. Previously, research has shown that frequent lucid dreamers are better at common tasks used in psychology studies, such as the Stroop test (in which, for example, the word green is written in blue ink and participants have to name the color, not the word). For this study, University of Lincoln psychologist Patrick Bourke decided to test his 68 study participants — 20 of whom were frequent lucid dreamers — using the Remote Associates Test, in which participants must figure out which word links three seemingly unrelated other words. Here's an example: Age. Mile. Sand. The common word linking all three? Stone. It's the kind of problem where you can't think of the answer until, all at once and seemingly out of nowhere, you do. In this study, the participants who reported frequent lucid dreams were better at the task than those who occasionally or rarely experienced lucid dreams. But why? The researchers believe that the cognitive skills that let lucid dreamers recognize and control their dreams may be related to this sort of problem-solving. In order to solve these sorts of insight problems, people need to "step back from perceived reality, reflect on it, and evaluate the perceptual evidence," the authors write. "For the insight that leads to lucidity, people also seem able to step back from the obvious interpretation and consider a remote and, at the time, implausible option — that it is all a dream." What the paper didn't demonstrate, however, was causality — in other words, you can't necessarily expect that if you train yourself to become a lucid dreamer, you'll also get better at this kind of problem solving. Most people have experienced a lucid dream at some point during their lives, and frequent lucid dreamers — those who have a lucid dream more than once a month — are fairly common, too, somewhere between 19 and 37 percent of the population. If you want to teach yourself how to be a lucid dreamer, these are the steps that seem to work, according to a recent analysis of the lucid dreaming literature: Write your dreams down when you wake up so that you can start to notice patterns in them, which, Bourke says, may help you spot when you're in one. As you're falling asleep, "rehearse" a dream in your mind, and imagine yourself becoming aware that you are dreaming. Throughout the day, ask yourself whether you could be dreaming. If you spot anything that seems weird, investigate. Bourke has had a few of his own lucid dreams in the years since he began researching the topic, and he described one in an email to Science of Us: I was going down an escalator to see if I could find information about a train I was planning to get. On the way down, I remember thinking that the information would not be there and I'd more likely find it back on the level I came from, so I hopped on the escalator to go back up. On the way, I looked up and noticed that I had another three levels of escalators to go. At that point I thought, "Impossible, I only came down one escalator. Could this be a dream?" I went to check by heading to a newsstand — in dreams, the text in books tends to change if you look at it, look away and look back again. I found all the books were academic books, and remember thinking — yeah, not likely in a train station. That's consistent with this being a dream. While we're on the subject: Are you absolutely certain you're not dreaming right now? Related question: Why is it suddenly raining cats? Sources Dreaming Lucid Dreamers Are Better Problem-Solvers Have you ever flown through the clouds or swum with unicorn dolphins? Done somersaults in zero gravity? I have! Maybe not in real life, but I've been lucky enough to have some amazing dreams that felt so real I could have been in the movie Inception. How cool would it be if you could create these dreams yourself? Or at least realize you're dreaming in the middle of one so you can do whatever you please? Well, some people can. They practice lucid dreaming, where the dreamer becomes aware that they're dreaming and may even gain some control over the dream content. Lucid dreaming is where the dreamer becomes aware that they're dreaming and may even gain some control over the dream content. Lucid dreaming has been part of spiritual practice around the world for centuries. Tibetan monks have called it "dream yoga," where dreamers train themselves to recognize they're in a dream and learn to control dream content. Islamic scriptures have described lucid dreaming as a special mental state for reaching the mystical. A 4th-century Christian theologian believed lucid dreaming to be a preview of the afterlife. These days, scientists and spiritualists alike practice this ancient art. One of the pioneers of modern research on lucid dreaming is Stephen La Berge, a scientist who kept a detailed dream diary for three years and, during that time, developed a lucid dreaming technique. He published his experiences as a case study in 1980, at which point he was reporting multiple lucid dreams per night. How did he do it? Is it even a real thing? If so, is it a good idea to practice lucid dreaming? In this two-part series, we'll take a trip through the neuroscience of lucid dreaming, learn how to decide if it's a good idea for you, and explore practical how-to tips for cultivating your own lucid dreams. In part one, we start with the question: Is lucid dreaming even a real thing? Is lucid dreaming a real brain phenomenon? Neuroscientists have been honing in on a method to prove that lucid dreaming is a real brain state that you can measure. Just this year, an international team of researchers published a set of bombshell studies in the journal *Current Biology* with the most compelling demonstrations yet—real-time two-way communication between a lucid dreamer and the outside world. An international team of researchers published a set of bombshell studies with the most compelling demonstrations yet—real-time two-way communication between a lucid dreamer and the outside world. In these studies, lucid dreamers received signals and questions from researchers while they were in a lucid dream, including flashing lights in Morse code, or spoken words played on a speaker. When they perceived the signals, they answered the yes/no questions by moving their eyes or twitching their face in a certain way. Using these two-way signals, lucid dreamers correctly answered questions such as "Do you speak Spanish?" and "What is eight minus six?" One participant described answering these questions while at a birthday party or fighting goblins. This not only shows that lucid dreamers really can be aware that they're dreaming, but that they can perceive the outside world, think, multi-task within a dream, and even communicate to the outside world using their sleeping body. How amazing! Can anyone do it? Now that you're as excited about lucid dreaming as I am, perhaps you're wondering if you can do it, too. There's good news: Even without meaning to, about half of the population experiences at least one lucid dream at some point. People are more likely to spontaneously experience a lucid dream if they're generally good at recalling their dreams, or if they have sleep disorders such as narcolepsy or psychiatric disorders like psychosis. Of course, this doesn't mean that if you lucid dream you have a brain disorder—it simply appears easier for the brain to allow lucid dreaming to happen when those disorders are present. If you're wondering if you already lucid dream, you can ask yourself some questions from the Lucidity and Consciousness in Dreams Scale, including items like: While dreaming, I was aware of the fact that what I was experiencing wasn't real While dreaming, I was able to change or move objects that would be impossible in waking While dreaming, I often asked myself if I was dreaming While dreaming, I was able to remember certain plans for the future Of course, lucid dreaming is not black-or-white, have-it-or-not. Just like regular dreams, there might be different levels of intensity, awareness that you're dreaming, and control you have in changing things. And let's be clear: It seems that even very lucid dreams cannot be completely controlled. It's not quite like in the Inception movie, where Elliot Page could walk around and create a whole gravity-bending city at a wave of his hand. Especially when it comes to creating details, the dreamscape may not totally respond to your wishes. Is lucid dreaming good for us? Lucid dreaming may be the ultimate virtual reality game, giving us the freedom to invent fantasy experiences beyond, or precisely akin to, our wildest dreams. Besides being fun, it might have some practical benefits, too. Besides being fun, lucid dreaming might have some practical benefits, too. For example, practicing a motor skill in a lucid dream can improve your performance in real life, similar to how much it would improve with waking practice, all without interfering with sleep quality. There is even some evidence that learning to lucid dream can help reduce the frequency or intensity of nightmares for people with PTSD. Lucid dreaming should not be used to replace treatment for PTSD or other psychological disorders. The research on lucid dreaming shows that while it may reduce the frequency and level of distress associated with trauma nightmares, it does not reduce PTSD symptoms or trauma-related sleep disturbance. Who should be cautious about trying to lucid dream? But some neuroscientists also advocate caution. For example, some are concerned that frequent lucid dreaming practice could be harmful to normal sleep by interrupting regular sleep cycles. They argue that lucid dreaming brain states are neither wake nor sleep, so we're not getting the benefits of REM sleep that we need when we lucid dream. Others worry that constantly practicing lucid dreaming blurs the lines between reality and dream, grounded and dissociating, which might increase the risk of psychosis. Some neuroscientists are concerned that frequent lucid dreaming practice could be harmful to normal sleep by interrupting regular sleep cycles. It is reassuring that a few studies have shown that, at least for a night or two in the sleep lab, practicing lucid dreaming did not negatively impact sleep quality, and that lucid or not, dreaming often is not associated with poor sleep in generally healthy adults. But I believe it's a good idea to practice lucid dreaming in moderation so as not to make a habit of replacing the type of sleep your body would have naturally produced. Because we don't yet fully understand the relationship between psychiatric disorders and lucid dreaming, we should be cautious here, too. Anyone with a family or personal history of psychosis (i.e., having hallucinations or bizarre beliefs), dissociation (i.e., feeling detached from reality or from your own body), or other psychiatric/neurological symptoms should consult with a psychiatrist before trying to practice lucid dreaming. And if any bizarre experiences start to happen during waking, such as feeling like the lines between reality and dreaming are getting blurry, you should stop trying to lucid dream and talk with a doctor. How do I get started? If you're like me, you're feeling eager to experience lucid dreaming! In part two of this dreaming series, I'll walk you through the methods scientists and lucid dreamers have used to cultivate this fascinating experience. I'll be trying these methods myself in the meantime—stay tuned for next week's episode to hear how I did. Wish me luck! Citations + Sources Mota-Rolim, S. A., Bulkeley, K., Campanelli, S., Lobão-Soares, B., de Araujo, D. B., & Ribeiro, S. The Dream of God: How Do Religion and Science See Lucid Dreaming and Other Conscious States During Sleep? *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2020. La Berge, S. P. Lucid dreaming as a learnable skill: A case study. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. 1980. Konkoly, K. R., Appel, K., Chabani, E., Mangiaruga, A., Gott, J., Mallett, R., ... & Paller, K. A. Real-time dialogue between experimenters and dreamers during REM sleep. *Current Biology*. 2021. Mota-Rolim, S. A., de Almondes, K. M., & Kirov, R. 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Is it a good idea to cultivate lucid dreaming? *Frontiers in psychology*. 2019. Ribeiro, N., Gounden, Y., & Quaglini, V. Is There a Link Between Frequency of Dreams, Lucid Dreams, and Subjective Sleep Quality? *Frontiers in psychology*. 2020. Aspy, D. J. Findings From the International Lucid Dream Induction Study. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2020. All content here is for informational purposes only. This content does not replace the professional judgment of your own mental health provider. Please consult a licensed mental health professional for all individual questions and issues. The Quick And Dirty Lucid dreaming is a fascinating phenomenon where a dreamer is aware of being in a dream, and may even be able to control the dream content. It's been practiced around the world for centuries and has been studied by neuroscientists, who can now hold two-way communications with a lucid dreamer in real-time. Many people spontaneously experience lucid dreaming at least once in their life, and many can learn to do it. Its potential benefits include improving skills, reducing nightmares, and of course, living out your wild fantasies. But we should also be cautious about lucid dreaming. Some scholars are worried that practicing it frequently could interfere with sleep quality, or contribute to symptoms of dissociation or psychosis. Someone with a history of psychiatric symptoms should consult their doctor before trying to lucid dream.

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