



# Why do we dream?

KS2

KS3

Ages 7-14 ⌚ 4 min read

Every single night, while you're lying there doing what looks like absolutely nothing, your brain is going absolutely mental. It's replaying memories, inventing stories, and sometimes terrifying you with scenarios involving exams you haven't studied for. This is dreaming.

The honest truth? Scientists still don't fully agree on *why* we dream. But they have some really compelling theories.

## Theory 1: Your brain is doing housekeeping

During the day, your brain collects an enormous amount of information — sights, sounds, emotions, facts. At night, it sorts through all of it. Dreaming might be what it feels like from the inside while your brain decides what to keep, what to connect to old memories, and what to bin. Studies show that people who sleep after learning something remember it better the next day. Your dreams might literally be your brain studying.

Think of your brain like a computer that can't do its proper backups while it's being used. At night, when everything goes quiet, it runs its maintenance programme — organising files, clearing out junk, connecting related folders. Dreaming is the weird graphics that appear on screen while it's working.

## Theory 2: Practice for scary situations

A lot of dreams involve threats — being chased, falling, failing. One theory says this is deliberate: your brain is running simulations of dangerous situations so you're better prepared if they actually happen. Like a fire drill for your emotions. The fact that you often wake up just before the really bad bit might be because the rehearsal is over — you've "practised" enough.

## Theory 3: Emotional processing

Ever noticed that when something big happens — good or bad — you often dream about it? Many researchers think dreams help us process emotions, especially difficult

ones. They let you "experience" stressful events in a safe environment, taking the edge off them. This might be why a good night's sleep genuinely does make things feel better in the morning.

## **When do dreams happen?**

Most vivid dreaming happens during a sleep stage called REM — Rapid Eye Movement. During REM, your brain is nearly as active as when you're awake, but your body is almost paralysed (so you don't act out your dreams, which would be chaos). You have several REM phases each night, getting longer towards morning — which is why the dreams you remember are usually the ones just before you wake up.