

Questions People Ask about the NDE

How many people have had this experience?

The Gallup Organization and near-death research studies have estimated some 13 million adults' NDEs in the US only. Add children's NDEs and all experiences worldwide, and the figure would be much larger. Near-death experiences are uncommon but not rare.

Why doesn't everybody close to death have one?

No one knows why some people do and others do not report a near-death experience under similar circumstances. NDEs occur to sane and ordinary people all over the world, people of all religions, races, backgrounds, and ages.

What causes a near-death experience?

More than a dozen theories have been put forward to explain the NDE and its physical causes, but none of them singly or together fits all cases.

This is the nuttiest thing I ever heard.

Like other things which have no rational explanation at the present time, NDEs may at first seem "nutty." An NDE is a genuine experience—an event which one individual experiences and remembers—and it has consequences, but it cannot yet be explained in terms of what we usually think of as "normal."

This sure doesn't sound very scientific.

Science deals with objective matters which can be observed, tested and measured by someone else. An NDE is a subjective experience: it can be felt and reported only by the person who has it. For this among other reasons, some people claim that the NDE cannot be scientifically "real." Conversely, other scientists consider NDEs as scientifically valid as any other intense personal experience. The difference may be that some scientists demand physical proof of reality, while others are less troubled by ambiguity. In any event, tens of thousands of NDEs are being reported from all parts of the world. Something does seem to be happening, whether or not everyone agrees that it is scientifically understandable.

My doctor says NDEs are hallucinations.

People who have experienced both an NDE and hallucination say they are quite different, and laboratory work supports this view. Your doctor may feel that he understands the term "hallucination" more than he does "NDE." There is no reason to fear that an NDE indicates some kind of psychotic episode.

Don't NDEs prove that there is life after death?

Certainly this is a very popular interpretation, although there is no "proof" in a statistical sense and no consensus on what this may mean. A more cautious expression is that NDEs suggest that some aspect of human consciousness may continue after physical death. No one can demonstrate whether this is true.

Are the people who have NDEs very religious?

People who report NDEs are no better or worse—and no more or less religious—than in any cross-section of the population. They come from many religious backgrounds and from the ranks of agnostics and even atheists. The experience seems more closely related to a person's life afterwards than to what it was before.

How do people react when they come back?

A person who has just had a near-death experience probably has very mixed feelings. One person may express anger or grief at being resuscitated; another struggles to stay awake. Other typical reactions:

- fear that the NDE was a psychotic episode;
- disorientation because reality has shifted;
- euphoria, feeling special or "chosen";
- withdrawal to ponder the experience.

Does an NDE really change a person's life?

Almost every near-death experiencer reports a changed understanding of what life is all about. The changes may be numerous and almost impossible to describe or explain. Besides losing the fear of death, a person may also lose interest in financial or career success. "Getting ahead" may seem like an odd game that the person chooses not to play any more, even if it means giving up friendships. This can be hard on families. Becoming more loving is important to most experiencers, though they may have difficulty explaining what they mean by that. They may seem to love everyone indiscriminately, with no personal favorites. Religious observance may increase or lessen, but deepened belief in God or a "higher power" is almost certain. People say, "Before, I believed; now I know." Some people find they have an increase in intuitive or psychic abilities. (This is a common stage in Christian, Jewish, and other major religious traditions when an individual spends much time in deep prayer and meditation.) If this becomes a problem, the IANDS office can suggest a source of information.

I had one of these experiences, but no one told me I was in danger. Was my doctor lying to me?

Probably not. "Near-death experiences" were named in 1975 by Dr. Raymond Moody, Jr. to describe the clinical death experiences of the people in his book *Life After Life*. However, although being close to death is a reliable "trigger," identical experiences happen under very different circumstances, even to people who are in no way ill. The best known are the experiences of saints and religious mystics. Deep prayer and meditation can produce events like NDEs, as can other kinds of altered states of consciousness.

When my mother was dying, we thought she was hallucinating, but what she described sounds like an NDE. Could this be true?

People who are dying often mention seeing a wonderful light or a landscape they want to enter. They may talk with people who are invisible to everyone else, or they may look radiant and at peace. Read *Final Gifts* or purchase and listen to our summary tape for more about "deathbed visions."