

Sources behind the stories

Cozy Cognitive Lab

Sources and Further Reading

Welcome to the research shelf!

Cozy Cognitive Lab turns psychology and neuroscience research into small, cozy stories about the wonderfully strange things our brains do.

Below you'll find research articles and trustworthy resources related to the topics I've covered. Please keep in mind that psychology is an evolving science and findings can be debated, refined, or challenged by newer research. When that's the case, I'll try to include that context here, too.

Grab something cozy and explore.

Why does time seem to speed up as we age?

1. [Wittmann & Lehnhoff \(2005\): Age Effects in Perception of Time](#)

What they studied:

Researchers surveyed 499 people between ages 14 and 94 about their experience of the passage of time.

What they found:

The results generally supported the familiar feeling that time seems to pass faster as we get older, but age explained only a relatively small amount of the differences between people's experiences.

Why it matters:

Our feeling that time accelerates with age is real for many people, but the explanation is more complicated than simply older brains perceive time faster.

Read the research:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16512313/>

2. [Friedman & Janssen \(2010\): Aging and the Speed of Time](#)

What they studied:

Researchers examined several different explanations for why time might seem to accelerate with age in 1,865 adults ages 16 - 80.

What they found:

People across age groups tended to say time passed quickly. Surprisingly, differences between younger and older adults were generally quite small, with a more noticeable age difference when people thought about the previous ten years.

Why it matters:

This is an important qualification to the popular time gets faster as you age story. There probably isn't one simple explanation for the experience.

Read the research:

https://researchmap.jp/read0153473/published_papers/1402627/attachment_file.pdf

Takeaway

Novelty, memory, attention, life changes and our retrospective judgments of time may all contribute to how long periods of our lives feel when we look back at them.

So while doing new things will slow time is too strong a scientific claim, giving our brains distinctive experiences may create more memorable landmarks in our lives.

The Zeigarnik effect: why do unfinished things stick with us?

1. APA Dictionary of Psychology: Zeigarnik Effect

The classic Zeigarnik effect describes the tendency for interrupted or unfinished tasks to be remembered better than completed ones. The phenomenon was named after psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik, who published her research in 1927.

Read the definition:

<https://dictionary.apa.org/zeigarnik-effect>

2. [Ghibellini & Meier \(2025\): Interruption, Recall and Resumption: A Meta-Analysis of the Zeigarnik and Ovsiankina Effects](#)

Researchers reviewed the evidence accumulated around the classic Zeigarnik effect.

What they found:

The famous memory advantage for unfinished tasks was not reliable overall. However, they did find evidence for a related phenomenon called the Ovsiankina effect: people tend to want to resume interrupted tasks.

Why it matters:

The Zeigarnik effect is frequently presented online as an established universal fact. Modern evidence suggests the real story is more complicated. I actually love this - complicated psychology stories are usually the most interesting ones!

Read the open-access review:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-05000-w>

3. [Masicampo & Baumeister \(2011\): Consider It Done! Plan Making Can Eliminate the Cognitive Effects of Unfulfilled Goals](#)

What they studied:

Researchers examined what happens when people have goals they haven't finished.

What they found:

Unfulfilled goals could produce intrusive thoughts and interfere with performance on unrelated activities. But people didn't necessarily have to complete the goal, making a specific plan for completing it later reduced the cognitive interference.

Why it matters:

When something keeps popping into your mind, giving it a concrete plan may sometimes help your brain stop repeatedly reminding you about it.

Read the research:

<https://aofirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MasicampoBaumeister2011JPSP.pdf>

Takeaway

While the Zeigarnik Effect is often described as “Your brain remembers unfinished tasks better,” the science is more nuanced. A better takeaway might be that unfinished goals can remain mentally active, and sometimes giving them a concrete plan helps quiet them down.

Why can't you tickle yourself?

1. [Blakemore, Wolpert & Frith \(1998\): Central Cancellation of Self-Produced Tickle Sensation](#)

This is the classic study behind this question.

What they studied:

Researchers compared people's responses to touch they generated themselves with touch generated externally, while also examining brain activity.

What they found:

Self-generated touch was perceived as less ticklish. The researchers found differences in activity involving the somatosensory cortex and cerebellum, supporting the idea that the brain predicts the sensory consequences of our own movements.

Why it matters:

Your brain isn't simply reacting to the world - it's constantly predicting what's going to happen next, including what your own actions are going to feel like.

Read the research:

<https://wolpertlab.neuroscience.columbia.edu/sites/wolpertlab.neuroscience.columbia.edu/files/content/papers/BlaWolFri98.pdf>

2. [Blakemore, Frith & Wolpert \(1999\): Spatio-Temporal Prediction Modulates the Perception of Self-Produced Stimuli](#)

What they did:

Researchers manipulated the timing and location of touch produced by participants' own movements.

What they found:

When the resulting sensation happened where and when the brain expected it, it was less ticklish. When researchers introduced discrepancies between the predicted and actual sensation, the touch became more ticklish.

Why it matters:

This provides evidence that prediction is an important part of why you can't normally tickle yourself. However, if you make your own touch sufficiently unpredictable, the experience starts to change.

Read the research:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chris-Frith/publication/12788126_Spatio-Temporal_Prediction_Modulates_the_Perception_of_Self-Produced_Stimuli/links/02e7e537db3f436332000000/Spatio-Temporal-Prediction-Modulates-the-Perception-of-Self-Produced-Stimuli.pdf

3. [Blakemore, Wolpert & Frith \(2000\): Why Can't You Tickle Yourself?](#)

This paper reviews the idea that the motor system uses an internal forward model to predict the sensory consequences of our own movements. In other words, when what actually happens matches what your brain predicted, the resulting sensation can be attenuated.

Read the overview:

<https://web.stanford.edu/~knutson/ans/blakemore02.pdf>

4. [Kilteni, Engeler & Ehrsson \(2020\): Efference Copy Is Necessary for the Attenuation of Self-Generated Touch](#)

More recent research has continued investigating the mechanism.

What they found:

Touch triggered by a person's own active movement felt weaker than externally generated touch. But when the movement was passive, the same attenuation wasn't observed.

Why it matters:

Simply knowing that two body parts are about to touch isn't enough. Information associated with generating the movement itself appears to play an important role in predicting and attenuating self-generated touch.

Read the open-access research:

[https://www.cell.com/iscience/pdf/S2589-0042\(20\)30026-2.pdf](https://www.cell.com/iscience/pdf/S2589-0042(20)30026-2.pdf)

5. [Kilteni & Ehrsson \(2020\) — Functional Connectivity Between the Cerebellum and Somatosensory Areas Implements the Attenuation of Self-Generated Touch](#)

Using brain imaging and behavioral measures, researchers found that self-generated touch was associated with reduced activity in somatosensory regions and that communication between the cerebellum and somatosensory areas was related to how strongly participants experienced sensory attenuation.

Why it matters:

It provides more evidence for the idea that the cerebellum helps the brain predict sensory consequences of our own actions.

Read the open-access research:

<https://www.jneurosci.org/content/jneuro/40/4/894.full.pdf>

Takeaway

You can't easily tickle yourself because your brain has information about the movement you're about to make and can predict some of its sensory consequences.

Want to keep exploring?

More sources will be added as new Cozy Cognitive Lab stories are posted. My goal isn't to reduce psychology to brain hacks or pretend that one experiment proves something about every

human being. Instead, Cozy Cognitive Lab is about exploring the questions psychologists ask, and what the evidence can, and sometimes can't, tell us.

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Psychology education only. Content is intended for general educational purposes and is not mental-health or medical advice.