**Why near-death events are tricks of mind**

**Near-death experiences are not paranormal but triggered by a change in normal brain function, according to researchers.**

Psychologists who reviewed a range of phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, visions of tunnels of light or encounters with dead relatives, say they are tricks of the mind rather than a glimpse of the afterlife.

**Reactions in the brain**

Researchers at the Universities of Edinburgh and Cambridge say that most of the experiences can be explained by a reaction in the brain prompted by a traumatic and sometimes harmless event.

The researchers say that many common near-death experiences could be caused by the brain’s attempt to make sense of unusual sensations and perceptions occurring during a traumatic event.

**Multi-sensory processes**

Out-of-body experiences, for example, may happen when there is a breakdown in the brain’s multi-sensory processes, and visions of tunnels and bright lights could stem from a breakdown in the brain’s visual system caused by oxygen deprivation.

The new study also points to the effects of noradrenaline, a hormone released by the mid-brain which, when triggered, may evoke positive emotions, hallucinations and other features of the near-death experience.

**Biological links**

Approximately three per cent of the US population say they have had a near-death experience, according to a Gallup poll.

Near-death experiences are reported across cultures and can be found in literature dating back to ancient Greece.

Some of the studies we examined show that many of the people experiencing a near-death experience were not actually in danger of dying, although most thought they were.

The scientific evidence suggests that all aspects of the near-death experience have a biological basis.

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The research is published in the Journal Trends in Cognitive Sciences.

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