

Lucid Dreaming FAQ

(Answers to these frequently asked questions on lucid dreaming brought to you by THE LUCIDITY INSTITUTE.)

Q. What is lucid dreaming?

A. The term "lucid dreaming" refers to dreaming while knowing that you are dreaming. The "lucid" part refers to the clarity of consciousness rather than the vividness of the dream. It generally happens when you realize during the course of a dream that you are dreaming, perhaps because something weird occurs. Most people who remember their dreams have experienced this at some time, often waking up immediately after the realization. However, it is possible to continue in the dream while remaining fully aware that you are dreaming.

Q. If you are lucid, can you control the dream?

A. Usually lucidity brings with it some degree of control over the course of the dream. How much control is possible varies from dream to dream and from dreamer to dreamer. Practice can apparently contribute to the ability to exert control over dream events. At the least, lucid dreamers can choose how they wish to respond to the events of the dream. For example, you can decide to face up to a frightening dream figure, knowing it cannot harm you, rather than to try to avoid the danger as you naturally would if you did not know it was a dream. Even this amount of control can transform the dream experience from one in which you are the helpless victim of frequently terrifying, frustrating, or maddening experiences to one in which you can dismiss for a while the cares and concerns of waking life. On the other hand, some people are able to achieve a level of mastery in their lucid dreaming where they can create any world, live any fantasy, and experience anything they can imagine!

Q. Does lucid dreaming interfere with the function of "normal" dreaming?

A. According to one way of thinking, lucid dreaming is normal dreaming. The brain and body are in the same physiological state during lucid dreaming as they are in during most ordinary non-lucid dreaming, that is, REM sleep. Dreaming is a result of the brain being active, at the same time as the sense organs of the body are turned off to the outside world. In this condition, typically during REM sleep, the mind creates experiences out of currently active thoughts, concerns, memories and fantasies. Knowing you are dreaming simply allows you to direct the dream along constructive or positive lines, like you direct your thoughts when you are awake. Furthermore, lucid dreams can be even more informative about yourself than non-lucid dreams, because you can observe the development of the dream out of your feelings and tendencies, while being aware that you are dreaming and that the dream is coming from you. The notion that dreams are unconscious processes that should remain so is false. Your waking consciousness is always present in your dreams. If it were not,

you would not be able to remember dreams, because you can only remember an event you have consciously experienced. The added "consciousness" of lucid dreaming is nothing more than the awareness of being in the dream state.

Q. Does everybody dream?

A. Everybody dreams. All humans (indeed, all mammals) have REM sleep. Most dreams occur in REM sleep. This has been demonstrated by awakening people from different stages of sleep and asking if they were dreaming. In 85 percent of awakenings from REM sleep, people report having been dreaming. Dreams are rarely reported following awakening from other types of sleep (collectively called non-REM sleep). REM sleep alternates with non-REM sleep in 90 minute cycles throughout the night. In a typical 8 hour night, you will spend about an hour and a half total time in REM sleep, broken up into four or five "REM periods" ranging in length from 5 to 45 minutes. Most dreams are forgotten. Some people never recall dreams while others recall five or more each night. You can improve your ability to recall dreams. Good dream recall is necessary for learning lucid dreaming. There are two basic things to do to get started with developing dream recall. Begin a dream journal, in which you write everything you remember of your dreams, even the slightest fragments. You will remember the most if you record dreams right after you awaken from them. Before falling asleep each night, remind yourself that you want to awaken from, remember and record your dreams.

Q. Why would you want to have lucid dreams?

A. The laws of physics and society are repealed in dreams. The only limits are the reaches of your imagination. Much of the potential of dreams is wasted because people do not recognize that they are dreaming. When we are not lucid in a dream, we think and behave as if we are in waking reality. This can lead to pointless frustration, confusion and wasted energy, and in the worst case, terrifying nightmares. It is useless to try as we do to accomplish the tasks of waking life in dreams. Our misguided efforts to do so result in anxiety dreams of malfunctioning machinery, missed deadlines, forgotten exams, losing the way, and so on. Anxiety dreams and nightmares can be overcome through lucid dreaming, because if you know you are dreaming you have nothing to fear. Dream images cannot hurt you. Lucid dreams, in addition to helping you lead your dreams in satisfying directions, enjoy fantastic adventures, and overcome nightmares, can be valuable tools for success in your waking life. Lucid dreamers can deliberately employ the natural creative potential of dreams for problem solving and artistic inspiration. Athletes, performers, or anyone who gives presentations can prepare, practice and polish their performances while they sleep. This is only a taste of the variety of ways people have used lucid dreaming to expand their lives.

Q. How do you have lucid dreams?

A. There are several methods of inducing lucid dreams. The first step, regardless of method, is to develop your dream recall until you can remember at least one dream per night. Then, if you have a lucid dream you will remember it. You will also become very familiar with your dreams, making it easier learn to recognize them while they are happening. If you recall your dreams you can

begin immediately with two simple techniques for stimulating lucid dreams. Lucid dreamers make a habit of "reality testing." This means investigating the environment to decide whether you are dreaming or awake. Ask yourself many times a day, "Could I be dreaming?" Then, test the stability of your current reality by reading some words, looking away and looking back while trying to will them to change. The instability of dreams is the easiest clue to use for distinguishing waking from dreaming. If the words change, you are dreaming. Taking naps is a way to greatly increase your chances of having lucid dreams. You have to sleep long enough in the nap to enter REM sleep. If you take the nap in the morning (after getting up earlier than usual), you are likely to enter REM sleep within a half-hour to an hour after you fall asleep. If you nap for 90 minutes to 2 hours you will have plenty of dreams and a higher probability of becoming lucid than in dreams you have during a normal night's sleep. Focus on your intention to recognize that you are dreaming as you fall asleep within the nap.

External cues to help people attain lucidity in dreams have been the focus of Dr. Stephen LaBerge's research and the Lucidity Institute's development efforts for several years. Using the results of laboratory studies, they have designed a portable device, called the DreamLight, for this purpose. It monitors sleep and when it detects REM sleep gives a cue -- a flashing light -- that enters the dream to remind the dreamer to become lucid. The light comes from a soft mask worn during sleep that also contains the sensing apparatus for determining when the sleeper is in REM sleep. A small custom computer connected to the mask by a cord decides when the wearer is in REM and when to flash the lights.

Q. Is there a way to prevent yourself from awakening right after becoming lucid?

A. At first, beginners may have difficulty remaining in the dream after they attain lucidity. This obstacle may prevent many people from realizing the value of lucid dreaming, because they have not experienced more than the flash of knowing they are dreaming, followed by immediate awakening. Two simple techniques can help you overcome this problem. The first is to remain calm in the dream. Becoming lucid is exciting, but expressing the excitement can awaken you. Suppress your feeling somewhat and turn your attention to the dream. If the dream shows signs of ending, such as the disappearance, loss of clarity or depth of the imagery, "spinning" can help bring the dream back. As soon as the dream starts to "fade," before you feel your real body in bed, spin your dream body like a top. That is, twirl around like a child trying to get dizzy (you probably will not get dizzy during dream spinning because your physical body is not spinning around). Remind yourself, "The next scene will be a dream." When you stop spinning, if it is not obvious that you are dreaming, do a reality test. Even if you think you are awake, you may be surprised to find that you are still dreaming!

Q. How can I find out more about lucid dreaming, or get involved in lucid dreaming research?

A. Contact the Lucidity Institute, an organization founded by lucid dreaming researcher Dr. Stephen LaBerge to support research on lucid dreams and to help people learn to use them to enhance

their lives. The Lucidity Institute's mission is to advance research on the nature and potentials of consciousness and to apply the results of this research to the enhancement of human health and well-being. The Lucidity Institute offers a membership society, whose quarterly newsletter, *NightLight*, discusses research and development in the field of lucid dreaming, and invites the participation of members in at-home experiments. Workshops and training programs are available periodically. The Institute sells books, tapes, scientific publications and the *DreamLight*.

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For additional information:
LaBerge, S., *LUCID DREAMING* (Los Angeles: Ballantine, 1985).
LaBerge, S. & Rheingold, H. *EXPLORING THE WORLD OF LUCID DREAMING* (New York: Ballantine, 1990).