

Babies make memories but cannot remember them

31st March 2025



Most people cannot recall memories of being a baby, nor of their infancy. However, some people claim they can remember things that happened in the first year of their lives. Researchers at Yale and Columbia University in the United States studied why people have no recollection of things that happened in the first four or five years of their lives. The research team also investigated whether or not babies formed memories at all. Researcher Dr Tristan Yates suggested we may not be able to remember being a baby. He said: "Our results suggest that babies' brains have the capacity for forming memories, but how long-lasting these memories are is still an open question."

The research has been published in the journal "Science". It suggests that babies as young as a year old can form and store memories. Researchers used a specially designed scanner to observe activity in an area of babies' brains called the hippocampus. This is where memories are created and stored. The research found that babies can form limited types of memories from the age of two months. It is possible that infants can detect patterns in people's faces, language and in daily routines. However, episodic memory, which allows us to recall specific events, may take longer to form. The researchers say this kind of memory may not occur until the hippocampus has more fully matured.

Sources: Aljazeera.com / nature.com / science.org

Writing

It would be great if we could remember being a baby. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

memories / baby / infancy / the first year of life / brains / capacity / open questions / research / researchers / scanner / two months / people's faces / language / routines

True / False

- 1) The research is from the universities of Yale and Columbia. T / F
- 2) The article says most people can recall memories of being a baby. T / F
- 3) Researchers say no one has any recollection of the first five years of life. T / F
- 4) A researcher questioned how long babies' memories were. T / F
- 5) Research suggests that one-year-old babies could store memories. T / F
- 6) Researchers used a supermarket scanner to scan babies' brains. T / F
- 7) Babies might be to understand patterns in daily routines. T / F
- 8) A baby's hippocampus might not be developed enough for memories. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. recall | a. developed |
| 2. infancy | b. enduring |
| 3. investigated | c. indicate |
| 4. suggest | d. particular |
| 5. long-lasting | e. looked into |
| 6. store | f. notice |
| 7. limited | g. remember |
| 8. detect | h. basic |
| 9. specific | i. keep |
| 10. matured | j. early childhood |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think of babies?
- b) What is your earliest memory?
- c) Would you like to be able to remember being a baby?
- d) What's your happiest memory?
- e) Would you like a memory machine to store all your memories?
- f) How often does your memory fail you?
- g) What can you remember about the first five years of your life?
- h) What might good baby memories be like?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Most people cannot recall memories | a. these memories are |
| 2. people claim | b. specific events |
| 3. people have no | c. they can remember things |
| 4. how long-lasting | d. question |
| 5. still an open | e. fully matured |
| 6. Researchers used a specially | f. memory |
| 7. It is possible that infants can | g. designed scanner |
| 8. episodic | h. of being a baby |
| 9. recall | i. detect patterns |
| 10. until the hippocampus has more | j. recollection of things |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- How good is your memory?
- Would a memory reader help with police investigations?
- Would you like to read the journal 'Science'?
- Would you like to access all of your memories?
- Do we need to keep all of our memories?
- What have you forgotten that you would like to remember?
- What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Spelling

- Most people cannot elcarl memories
- people have no coeoelnlrct
- The research team also genisitdeavt
- Yates eegudtqss we may not be able to
- babies' brains have the atcpiyca
- how nn-goagtlsil these memories are
- published in the ralonju "Science"
- specially designed scanner to sebeory activity
- tecetd patterns in people's faces
- sdieiocp memory
- recall cfiiscpe events
- the hippocampus has more fully edmtuar

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. j	3. e	4. c	5. b
6. i	7. h	8. f	9. d	10. a

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions. (Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What can most people not remember besides being a baby?
2.	What two universities are the researchers from?
3.	What is the job of Tristan Yates?
4.	What did a researcher suggest babies have the capacity for?
5.	What is still an open question?
6.	Where has the research been published?
7.	What did researchers use to look at babies' brains?
8.	What is the area of the brain that stores memories called?
9.	What does episodic memory allow us to recall?
10.	What must a baby's hippocampus do to allow them to remember more?

Speaking – Life Memories

Rank these with your partner. Put the best period for memories of your life at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| • Infancy | • University |
| • Elementary school | • Part-time jobs |
| • Junior high school | • Holidays |
| • High school | • Twenties |

Answers – True False

1	T	2	F	3	F	4	T	5	T	6	F	7	T	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.