

The Brain's Negativity Bias

WHY ONE NEGATIVE EVENT CAN OUTWEIGH SEVERAL POSITIVE ONES

Your brain is wired to notice, remember and give more weight to negative information. This bias once helped our ancestors stay alive. Today, it can make everyday challenges feel bigger than they are.

WHAT IS NEGATIVITY BIAS?

Negativity bias is the brain's tendency to pay more attention to, learn from and remember negative experiences than positive ones. One critical comment, disappointment or mistake can have a stronger and longer-lasting impact than several positive experiences.

WHY IT EXISTS

From an evolutionary perspective, noticing danger was essential for survival. Although we no longer face the same physical threats, the brain still prioritises negative information, even when the "threat" is social, emotional or perceived.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BRAIN?

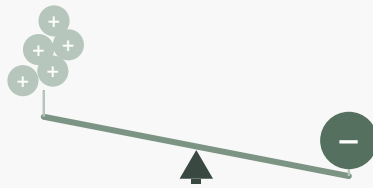
Negative experiences trigger a stronger response in the amygdala and greater release of stress hormones such as cortisol. They are also more likely to be encoded in long-term memory, making them easier to recall later.

A BRAIN THAT SCANS FOR THREATS

Your brain is like a smoke alarm — designed to detect danger quickly, even if it means a few false alarms.

5 : 1 RESEARCH SUGGESTS

It can take up to five positive experiences to have the same emotional impact as one negative experience.



NOT MORE TRUE. JUST MORE NOTICEABLE.

Negative events are not necessarily more common or more accurate representations of reality — they are simply given more weight by the brain.

COMMON WAYS NEGATIVITY BIAS SHOWS UP

FOCUS

Noticing what went wrong instead of what went well.

MEMORY

Remembering mistakes more vividly than successes.

SELF-PERCEPTION

A single criticism can undermine confidence.

RELATIONSHIPS

Negative feedback can feel louder than praise.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Difficult experiences tend to stay with you for longer.

WHY IT MATTERS

Negativity bias can affect mood, self-esteem, relationships, decision-making and overall wellbeing.

Understanding this bias helps you recognise that your brain is doing what it was designed to do — and gives you the opportunity to respond with more balance and self-compassion.

YOU CAN INFLUENCE THE BALANCE

While you can't remove negativity bias, you can counteract it by intentionally noticing, savouring and recording positive experiences. With practice, you can train your attention to be more balanced.

A MORE BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

Your brain notices the storm to keep you safe. You can also choose to notice the sunshine.

REFLECTION

1. A RECENT NEGATIVE EVENT

What is a recent negative event that has stayed on my mind?

2. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

What are some positive experiences from the same time period that also matter?

3. NOTICING THE POSITIVE

How can I remind myself to notice and give space to the positive, too?

SOURCES

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