

Ignorance is bliss? Why people prefer to remain unaware of potentially unpleasant but useful information

A study of more than 2,000 people in Germany and Spain by Gerd Gigerenzer of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin and Rocio Garcia-Retamero of the University of Granada in Spain [found that 90 percent of them would not want to find out](#), if they could, when their partner would die or what the cause would be. And 87 percent also reported not wanting to be aware of the date of their own death... We often prefer to avoid learning information that could cause us pain.

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More consequentially, people avoid learning certain information related to their health even if having such knowledge would allow them to identify therapies to manage their symptoms or treatment. As one study found, [only 7 percent of people at high risk for Huntington's disease elect to find out whether they have the condition](#).

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This general body of research suggests that deliberate ignorance is a widespread preference not only in relation to painful news and events, such as death and divorce, but also pleasurable ones, such as birth... More than 60 percent indicated not wanting to know about their next Christmas present. And about 37 percent said they'd prefer not to find out the sex of their unborn child. This result might have something to do with the possibility of disappointment, but the bigger issue, this research shows, is that people enjoy the suspense.

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