

‘Mind after midnight’: How our brains evolved to hyperfocus on the negative after dark

Plenty of evidence suggests the [human mind functions differently](#) if it is awake at nighttime. Past midnight, negative emotions tend to draw our attention more than positive ones, [dangerous ideas grow](#) in appeal and inhibitions fall away.

Some researchers think the human [circadian rhythm](#) is heavily involved in these critical changes in function, as they outline in a [new paper](#) summarizing the evidence of how brain systems function differently after dark.

Their hypothesis, called ‘Mind After Midnight’, suggests the human body and the human mind follow a natural 24-hour cycle of activity that influences our emotions and behavior.

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According to the researchers, to cope with this increased risk, our attention to negative stimuli is unusually heightened at night. Where it might once have helped us jump at invisible threats, this hyper-focus on the negative can then feed into an altered reward/motivation system, making a person particularly prone to risky behaviors.

Add sleep loss to the equation, and this state of [consciousness](#) only becomes more problematic.

“There are millions of people who are awake in the middle of the night, and there’s fairly good evidence that their brain is not functioning as well as it does during the day,” [says](#) neurologist Elizabeth Klerman from Harvard University.

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