

## A flash of intense consciousness after breathing stops, but before a person dies? What's happening?

In their last minutes of life, some people's brains generate a surge of surprisingly organized-looking electrical activity that may reflect consciousness — although scientists aren't entirely sure.

According to new research, published Monday (May 1) in the journal [PNAS](#)(opens in new tab), this surge can sometimes occur after a person's breathing stops but before the brain stops functioning. The activity pattern is somewhat similar to what is seen when people are awake or in dreamlike states, leading to speculation that perhaps these electrical surges reflect the otherworldly experiences reported by people who've had close brushes with death: A sense of looking at the body from the outside; a tunnel and white light; or a sense of reliving important memories.

However, since all the patients in the new study ultimately died, it's impossible to know if they had such experiences.

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Some people may experience something like near-death experiences in these moments, [neurologist Daniel] Kondziella said, but we may never know for sure. And again, these experiences may not be unique to death — a more likely explanation for near-death experiences that encompasses both life-threatening experiences and non-life-threatening experiences, he said, may be "REM sleep intrusion into wakefulness," a situation in which the brain blends waking and dreaming states.

**[This is an excerpt. Read the original post here](#)**