

Debate

Would you pop a pill that could

As scientists work on a pill that promises to wipe out your unhappiest memories, we ask would



YES 'SUCH A PILL WOULD BE ABLE TO SAVE US FROM NEGATIVE FEELINGS'

says Dr Menis Yousry, author of *Discover Your Hidden Memory And Find The Real You* (£10.99, Hay House)

We become conscious after around six months inside our mother's womb. From this point until we're three years old, we simply 'respond' to our environment – a mother's smile, the sound of a rattle, the taste of milk. What we don't do is form long-lasting memories, as our brains aren't yet developed enough. This is why it's rare for people to recall memories before this age.

The crux of this is that many people – particularly those who endured traumatic experiences as children – often struggle with 'unexplained' negative feelings. As we know, this can lead to problems later on in life.

A pill would mean people could start with a clean slate and move forward with their lives rather than always looking back. This is because human consciousness is about completion – we feel incomplete if we don't resolve painful past experiences. But it's hard to do this, which is why such a pill would be so useful – if not life-saving – for some. For example, those who are abused as infants who never escape their horrific experiences.

It's the same for adults: say you were hit by a car, or were a soldier hit by a grenade – your body goes into fight or flight mode during the event, diverting blood away from the brain to protect you. The result: your memory doesn't get enough blood supply to properly formulate the experience, which leads to flashbacks. You are then forced to keep reliving the memory because your brain doesn't know what to do with it.

A pill that could erase severe trauma may seem like a million miles away, but it's getting closer – and that, I believe, can only be a good thing.



Sadly, I think we learn more from our bad memories than our good ones.
J King

If you could forget life's biggest heartaches, why wouldn't you? Life would be happier without the pain.
Toni Ellison

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erase your bad memories?

you rather have a clean slate or total recall? Two experts argue it out



NO 'MEMORIES SHAPE US AND MAKE US WHO WE ARE'

says Catriona Morrison, senior lecturer in experimental psychology at the University of Leeds

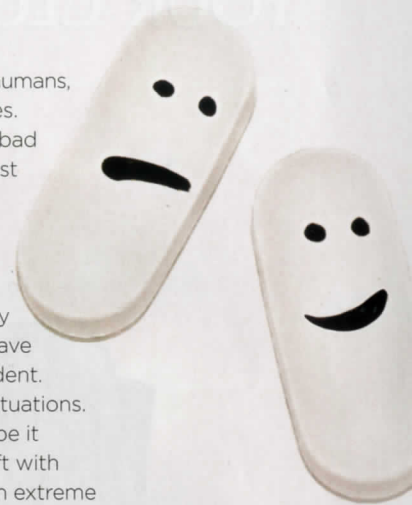
Why would you want to erase your memories? They give us an understanding of who we are and our place in the world. Crucially, memories act like a psychological compass. When faced with new life experiences we use them to learn from the past - they're like a red flag that encourage us to do things differently in future. An experiment at the University of Puerto Rico's School of Medicine is a good example. Researchers created stress 'triggers' in rats by giving them small electric shocks when music was played. The rats soon associated music with pain and froze when they heard it. But when they were given doses of this new memory-erasing pill those

red flags were removed. If this was the case in humans, we may be in danger of repeating our mistakes.

I'd also question the need for a pill to erase bad memories, as it's proven that our recall for most events is rarely accurate, but filtered through rose-tinted glasses to aid our wellbeing.

Another problem is that a pill isn't selective about what it erases, so you'd remove your entire history. Patients with amnesia show they struggle to plan for the future because they have no sense of the past and life before their accident. Consequently, they rarely adapt well to new situations.

Some scientists working on this new pill hope it will lead to new treatments to help soldiers left with post-traumatic stress disorder. Even in such an extreme scenario, I would not recommend a chemical fix. You can't escape your emotions - therapy is a far more effective solution to face up to your past and improve your ability to function normally in the future.



Would erasing your memories lead to happiness or sadness?

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