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highlights

The look of fear

We continuously look at people's faces to judge how they feel: happy, sad, angry or afraid? A region of the brain called the amygdala is needed to make such judgements, and a new study shows how. A rare subject with bilateral amygdala damage was impaired in her ability to make use of information from the eye region in the face. This resulted in a severe impairment in her ability to recognize fear. Strikingly, when she was instructed to look at other people's eyes, her recognition of fear became normal. This suggests that our brains actively seek out important social cues in the environment, and that impairments in this mechanism in diseases such as autism might be overcome by instructing patients to change the way they look at the world.

letters to nature

A mechanism for impaired fear recognition after amygdala damage
RALPH ADOLPHS, FREDERIC GOSSELIN, TONY W. BUCHANAN, DANIEL TRANEL, PHILIPPE SCHYNS & ANTONIO R. DAMASIO
Nature **433,** 68–72 (2005); doi:10.1038/nature03086
| First Paragraph | Full Text (HTML / PDF) |

news and views

Cognitive science: Staring fear in the face
PATRIK VUILLEUMIER
The unusual case of SM, a person who has a very specific deficit in recognizing fearful expressions on people's faces, is providing intriguing insights into how we perceive emotion.
Nature **433,** 22–23 (2005); doi:10.1038/433022a
| Full Text (HTML / PDF) |

6 January 2005 table of contents