



The common myth behind why people blink is that the simple action, closing and opening the eye, serves to keep the eyeball moist. But research has shown that blinking serves as a more crucial part to learning and processing information.

The reason why people blink has long been believed to be to keep the eye moist. If that were true, though, in humid places in the world it would be less necessary to blink than in dry places. But research has shown that people blink an equal number of times regardless of the weather. So, why is it that people blink as often, and as regularly, as they do?

Blinking to Process Information

In a recent RadioLab podcast, film editor Walter Murch was interviewed about his editing of *The Conversation* by Francis Ford Coppola. Murch says that as he cut the film, he listened to the flow of the movie, and making cuts to the film based on when there was an appropriate pause.

He noticed that his cuts to the film coincided with the actor Gene Hackman's blinking in the movie. This was totally contrary to the previously held belief that the purpose of blinking was to moisten the eye. Instead it seems that blinking is a lot like editing a film, cutting up life into various chunks of information to be processed separately.



Blink research

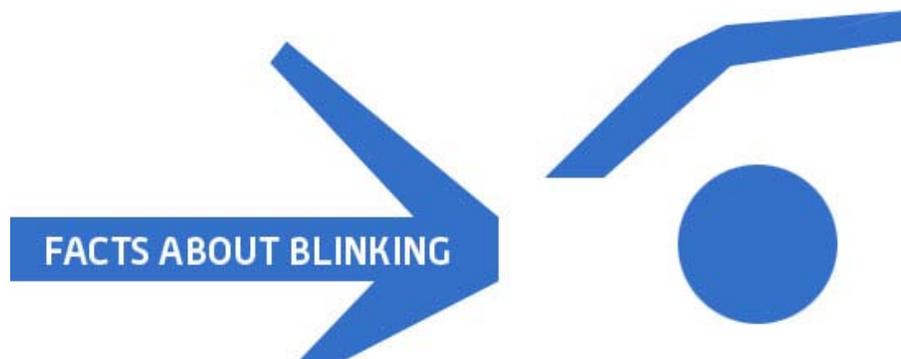
Scientist Tamani Nakano did a research project using subjects watching a video while being connected to a machine that recorded when the movie-watchers blinked. In the experiment, the movie *Mr. Bean* was played to the audience.

What researchers found out was that the test subjects all blinked at the same moments in the movie when they watched the movie more than once. Also, one-third of subjects blinked simultaneously with the other subjects in the survey. That is equivalent to 70 people in a movie theater blinking at the same time. Researchers noticed that people would blink in synchrony when a character in the movie was at the end of an action – a door shutting for example. This suggests that people have a mechanism for controlling their blinks, that blinking is not involuntary as previously believed.

Missing Information

When we blink, a part of our brains actually does shut down and we miss whatever information happens during the time our eyes are closed, according to a study published in *Current Biology* by University College London.

According to the research done by the Institute of Neurology, it was found that blinking suppressed information in the visual cortex of the brain as well as parts of the brain that register environmental change.



About six seconds of every minute are lost to blinking. That's ten percent of a minute. In a 150-minute long movie, we lose 15 minutes for blinking and in an average lifespan we spend two years in darkness while we blink.

- *Blinking edits life into small chunks of information*
- *People in a movie theater often blink at the same moments during the film*
- *When someone blinks, a part of their mind actually shuts down for a split second*
- *In an average lifetime, two years are lost to blinking*

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