MINDTHEORY

Why Your Brain Keeps Predicting What Will Happen Next

Your brain is not just reacting to the world — it's constantly predicting what will happen next. This helps you stay safe, save energy and make faster decisions.

1 How Predictive Processing Works

Your brain constantly combines past experiences with current sensory information to predict what will happen next.

1 Sensory Input
Your senses capture information from the world.

2 Past Experiences
Your brain uses memories and patterns to make predictions.

3 Prediction
Your brain generates a best guess about what will happen next.

4 Action & Update
You respond, and your brain keeps refining its predictions based on what actually happens.

2 Anxiety as Over-Prediction

Anxiety can happen when the brain overestimates potential threats and predicts negative outcomes, even when the actual danger is low.

Overestimates Threats
The brain predicts worst-case scenarios, even for uncertain situations.

Focuses on Risk
It pays more attention to possible danger than to safety.

Keeps You on High Alert
This can lead to constant worry, tension and mental fatigue.

Hard to Switch Off
The brain keeps running predictions, even when there is no real threat.

Prediction Errors Help Us Learn

When reality doesn't match our prediction, it creates a 'prediction error'.

This helps the brain update its model and learn, making future predictions more accurate.

3 3 Ways to Retrain Your Brain

You can't stop your brain from predicting, but you can make its predictions more balanced and less anxious.

1 Be Present with Your Senses

- Use the 5-4-3-2-1 technique.
- Notice what you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste.
- This brings your brain back to the present moment.

2 Challenge Negative Predictions

- Ask: "What evidence do I have?"
- Consider alternative outcomes.
- Look for past examples where things turned out better than expected.
- Try a more balanced, realistic view.

3 Build New, Positive Experiences

- Try new activities and environments.
- Create positive experiences to give your brain new data.
- Over time, this helps form more balanced and flexible predictions.

Key Takeaway

Your brain predicts to keep you safe, save energy and help you navigate life. By understanding this process and practising these strategies, you can reduce anxiety, welcome surprises and build a calmer, more resilient mind.