

Why do some people love scary movies, while others hate them?

One Dalhousie University professor says our brains shape our responses to fear
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(stock photo)

Why do some people love scary movies, while others hate them?

One Dalhousie University professor says the answer is in your head.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Simon Sherry says our brains shape our responses to fear.

"People who are high in sensation-seeking, their brain is chronically under-stimulated ... so sensation-seekers are always going to be on the lookout for experiences that are stimulating, risky and diverse," Sherry says. "They're always on the hunt for increased physiological arousal to deal with that difference in their brain."

Sherry tells NEWS 95.7's The Sheldon MacLeod Show, this is why some people pay hundreds of dollars to jump out of an airplane.

However he adds not all sensation-seekers want to expose themselves to actual danger in order to get a rush, so they stick to watching Jason Voorhees terrorize teens at a summer camp.

Other personalities avoid slasher flicks because they have intense and negative reactions to stress.

"They often have a really strong startle response, so when something scares them, psychologically and physiologically, they react very strongly," Sherry says. "That's in their biology, that's in their brain. They're just more reactive to unpleasant sensations like being scared while watching *The Exorcist*."

He says studies have shown some people who watch horror movies can still experience negative consequences a week later.

"They were still having some problems with sleep, some problems with flashbacks and a lot of unwanted thoughts and recollections of these movies."

Sherry says if people repeatedly expose themselves to their fears, they can eventually become desensitized.