

Research sheds light on links between memory and smell

March 18 2014, by Mikaeli Costello



French novelist Marcel Proust's memories started to flow when he tasted a madeleine cake dipped in linden tea, as he had been given as a child.

(Medical Xpress)—Scents and smells can form the basis of some of the most significant memories that humans form in their lives.

A University of Queensland-led international team has boosted understanding of the smell-memory connection, by showing that olfactory memory in honeybees regulates receptors in their antennae.

Bees' antennae function like a human nose, say Queensland Brain

Institute scientists Dr Judith Reinhard and Associate Professor Charles Claudianos.

"French novelist Marcel Proust in his novel Remembrance of Things Past (also known as In Search of Lost Time) described how his childhood memories started to flow when he tasted a madeleine cake dipped in linden tea, as he had been given as a child," Dr Reinhard said.

"Our team found that odour memories trigger recall of associated events, and that long-term odour [memory formation](#) in the brain regulates the [sense of smell](#) in the 'nose' via regulating the receptor molecules.

"Preferences for different foods and beverages are linked to our sense of smell, and our research shows that long-term scent memories modify how odours are perceived.

"In a nutshell: our smell experiences shape our preferences."

"The study demonstrates for the first time that the ability to smell different things is experience-dependent and modulated by scent conditioning."

Dr Claudianos said the findings may help explain the wide variability of smell perception in humans and the neurological mechanism underlying the common phenomenon of "acquired taste", where repeated sensory experience with a flavour or aroma leads to perceptual changes.

"This knowledge will provide an enormous insight for understanding food and aroma perception," he said.

"The discovery may also provide a means to detect early problems with memory formation and [memory](#) retrieval in the brain."

Individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism and schizophrenia, or neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease often have an altered sense of [smell](#) perception.

More information: Claudianos, C., Lim, J., Young, M., Yan, S., Cristino, A. S., Newcomb, R. D., Gunasekaran, N. and Reinhard, J. (2014), "Odor memories regulate olfactory receptor expression in the sensory periphery." *European Journal of Neuroscience*.
doi: 10.1111/ejn.12539

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Research sheds light on links between memory and smell (2014, March 18) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-links-memory.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.