

Earthquakes 101

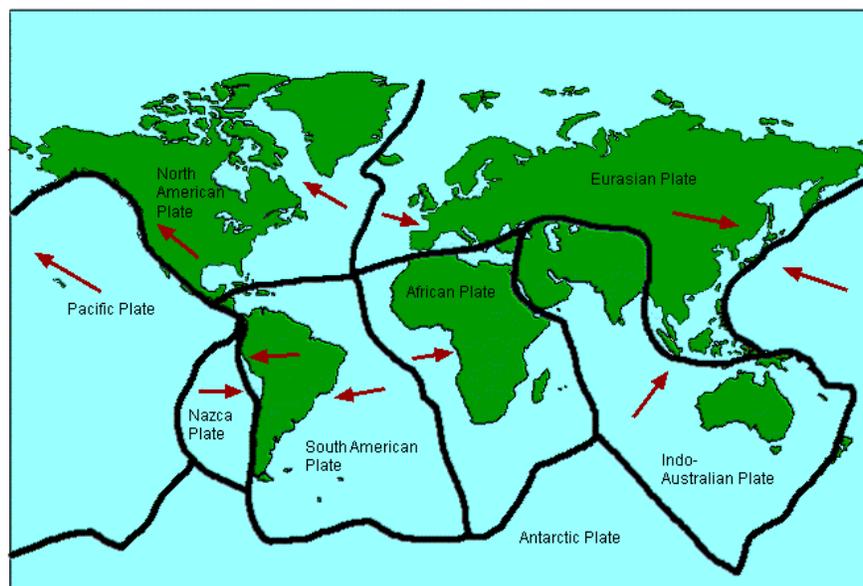


Have you ever experienced an earthquake? Chances are, you have at some point even if you don't realize it.

Want to know why? Because hundreds of earthquakes rock the Earth every day. That's literally millions of earthquake each year!

You don't feel most of them because they're too small or they happen too far below the surface of the earth. There are others, however, that can be felt thousands of miles away and can cause a lot of death and destruction.

So what exactly is an earthquake anyway? In the most basic terms, an earthquake is a way for the earth to release stress and pressure. The outer layer of the earth is called the "crust." It's pretty thin. The crust may appear to be one giant piece, but that's not the case. In actuality, the entire crust is more like a jigsaw puzzle with about twenty pieces! Each puzzle piece is called a tectonic plate. See the diagram below.



These plates are constantly moving. They move really slowly, about 1-2 inches per year. That's pretty slow, in fact that's the rate at which your hair grows. But when these plates scrape, bump or drag along other plates, they cause earthquakes.

Earthquakes are measured by a machine called a "seismograph." It uses the Richter scale, which was invented in 1934 by California scientist Charles Richter. It is a scale that measures the magnitude, or force, of an earthquake. The scale goes from 1-10. Earthquakes at 1 are very small. At 5 and above, there can be serious damage. Earthquakes measuring 8 and above are considered very dangerous. Powerful earthquake like these can cause landslides, tsunamis, and flooding. They can be really catastrophic.



Life would be so much easier if geologists could predict earthquakes! Unfortunately, that's not possible for the moment. However, research is being done right now to create more advanced technology.

The truth is that earthquakes can happen anytime or anywhere. Although they don't last long (they are under a minute), they can cause a lot of destruction. The best thing to do is to follow some safety tips in case you find yourself in an earthquake. First of all, try not to panic. Then, get underneath a sturdy piece of furniture like a table or desk, cover your face with your arms and hang on as best you can. Your family should create a family safety plan and should have a first aid kit and supplies on hand in case.

But the chances of you experiencing a big earthquake are small. They are quite rare! So you don't need to worry about it...



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