

The Positive Effects of Cuddling  
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### A Warm Embrace Filled with Science

There are times when we all feel we need a hug. Being social creatures by nature, humans crave affection in times where stress has overtaken our daily lives. This craving is backed by multiple sources of research, questions and theories from accredited scientists as well as ourselves. Why do we have these cravings, and how do we understand where they come from?

Oxytocin, the chemical released during childbirth, is a hormone circulating in our hypothalamus. Being primal creatures, this hormone is designed to help us procreate. These chemical releases when we lock eyes with the person across the room and smile, cuddle up with our pets, or sing our favorite song. The main goal of Oxytocin is to stimulate comfort, familiarity, and excitement about achieving these tasks.

Particularly in women, this hormone is quintessential to our well-being. Released during childbirth as well as breast-feeding, this source of connection draws us closer to our newborns. However, in order to have newborns we must find a partner. Women are designed to seek out partners with strong characteristics. These can come in the form of not only physical appearance, but qualities of character as well.

Lust is run by Testosterone (The male hormone) and Estrogen (The female hormone), Attraction by Dopamine (The reward hormone), Norepinephrine (The fight-or-flight hormone), and Serotonin (The happy hormone), and Attachment through Oxytocin (The attachment hormone) and Vasopressin (The protection hormone). Scientifically, all of these chemicals come together to help us find partners we feel stimulate these hormones, making us feel safe and happy. There is even a scientific term of being “Chemically Bonded” with a partner. What is important here is that Oxytocin also coincides with family relationships. It is not oxytocin itself that spurs romantic feelings for a partner, it is a combination of all the above.

You receive that horrible text from a partner or hear those five dreadful words: “We need to break up”. The next few days are horrendous, learning to live on your own again with someone you once considered a future with. This is partially due to the drop in these hormones. For months or even years, large quantities of these hormones being released has become the new normal for your psyche. The sudden drop in these can absolutely affect your brain, mood, and overall motivation.

These chemicals stimulate love, hope, and comfort, leading to cravings for human intimacy when without it for a while. These compulsions are not just due to who you are, your qualities and characteristics, but chemical changes as well. The next time you find yourself cuddling, laughing, or falling in love with a partner, take solace in this comfort. Your brain is helping you move along freely without reservation. If you find yourself feeling down and lonely, phone a friend for a hug. Even running towards a long-distance family member at the airport causes these shifts. These can all boost oxytocin immediately and combat the feelings of solitude. Phone someone you love, and get in all of the hugs that you can!

## Sources:

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