

The Science of Love

rekindling the chemistry

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16th May 2021

For many couples, the early days of romance is filled with heady thrill and buzzing anticipation, soaring desires, hope, excitement & stolen moments. Research tells us that the experience of Romantic Love and its associates, Lust and Attraction, is largely neuro-chemical and hormonally driven, occurring in both partners simultaneously. From the moment you lay eyes on each other, or perhaps at the first sight of your partner's image on the dating app, your body becomes a science lab, a mixture of hormonal & chemical reactions, in a phase referred to as *limerance*.

Let’s take a closer look at this.

Romantic Love stimulates the amygdala, the part of the brain which manages emotions as well as the reward system, inhibiting fear and good judgement & increasing positive mood. The hormone *vasopressin* creates a protective urge while *testosterone* & *eostrogen* feed the sexual desire; a neurochemical cocktail of *dopamine, adrenalin, serotonin* and *cortisol* all bubble together in the pot of attraction. A dash of *oxytocin,* frequently referred to as *the cuddle hormone,* subdues anxiety and fuels the sense of comfort and pleasure experienced when in each other’s company or your mind recalls the moments together; the expression in their eyes, the feel of their touch, their words and sound of their laughter.

Remember that buzz now? It makes sense, right? You felt so alive, vibrant, capable of conquering anything together with the positive energy and vibes that flowed between, around and through you.

Now fast forward 6 years.

Toddlers running around, toys on the floor, bags under your eyes from sleepless nights, weary with the 24/7 grind of cajoling offspring out of their pyjamas, hasty breakfasts and hasty reminders as you run out the door, toddler under your arm, drop off at daycare, gritting your teeth in stalled traffic on your way to work, not stopping to breathe as you work your way through the emails, lists, customers, orders, patients, management and government demands. Then it’s time to pick up from daycare, rush to after school activities, hasty hello flung in your partner’s direction, dinner on the table, hungry tired toddler wanting cuddles, ‘look I scratched my knee’. Finally it’s 10pm and you're exhausted, eyes heavy, limbs weary. Nothing left to give anyone. And there are still bills to pay, and preparation for tomorrow. Your shoulders droop, weighed down with heavy responsibility, no down time, the endless grind.

*Where is that joy again??*

Do you even **see** that person sitting across from you? What’s going on in their life? What challenges are they facing? What are their dreams now? You’re drained, depleted, disconnected and distant from your partner, you may feel alone in your relationship and resentful of your life and your partner. It might feel like you’re doing it all alone. An uphill slog. The dreams you once wrote for yourselves are now forgotten stories on a dilapidated bookshelf. The science lab is untenanted & cobwebby, the test tubes dusty and no longer in use. The chemicals and hormones are low in stock and no order has been placed for more. You feel alone at the bottom of a dry, brittle barrel.

How do you come back from that?

Ok, let’s normalise this: life stage transitions bring with them commonly experienced troubles like this. You are not alone. Studies of all kinds of couples - struggling couples on the brink of giving up, thriving couples, empty-nesters, couples young in their relationship, with and without children - show that the 6 year mark is often a breaking point in relationships. Then, later down the track when the offspring are embarking on their own adventures, writing their own stories, parents have time to review and reflect on life. This sparks more soul searching, rediscovering identities as an individual, older, experienced in life, unearthing and reassessing old dreams, ticking off boxes, evaluating achievements. Another pothole in the road through life.

Where do you start rediscovering who you are in your relationship? Who really is that person occupying the other half of your bed? Where did the decades go? When did the wrinkles arrive? And you panic.

There are many things you can do to help yourself and your partner reconnect to those younger versions of yourself, reclaim the vibrancy, reignite the passion. There are things you can do to help yourself and your partner get through each day. They don’t take much time and with each act, you deepen your bond, create more opportunities for connection, encouragement, support, even laughter and joy and yes, perhaps even a stolen kiss and grope in the pantry.



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