

HUGGING SEASON HERE

A SIMPLE SIX-SECOND EMBRACE CAN PUT PEOPLE AT EASE SOCIALLY AND MAY BE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

It's December! Brace yourself folks. For the vast majority, it means families, food, Christmas presents ... and hugs. Lots and lots of hugs. Baby hugs. Grandparent hugs. It's just hug season, all the way through.

For some of us, this is great! Most people like hugging. My clients even hug me. Some like longer hugs, some like shorter. Some like firm bear hugs, others like the accompanied air kiss, or the opposite of that. But in whatever their shape or form, the general consensus is that hugs are fantastic.

Then there are the other people. Those who dislike hugs, or actively avoid them. We all know one. Maybe we are one. For them, the Christmas season is one unending nightmare of invaded personal space and drooling infants.

Whether you love them or hate them, hugs are a part of our lives. It turns out that they're more than a pleasant/annoying traditional greeting or show of affection!

Since you're going to be giving and receiving a lot more of them in the very near future, here are some interesting reasons why hugging people is not only pleasant, but good for your health.

Love, thy name is oxytocin! Well, kind of. Feelings of love are created through a cocktail of chemicals and hormones in the brain and body. One of the big ones is oxytocin. Oxytocin makes you feel good and makes you connected with other people.

Guess what?

Hugs release oxytocin.

The exact length you need to hug someone to enjoy a shot of the said oxytocin seems to vary from five to seven seconds, so I



like to split the difference and just say six. After a nice, six-second hug, your body releases some feel-good hormones and you feel more connected to the person you just held.

Even if we don't know the science behind it, we intuitively know that physical closeness makes us feel more connected. The role of oxytocin is complex but there's increasing evidence to prove other health benefits:

■ **Boosts the immune system:** The presence of oxytocin increases other hormones which fight off infection. Simply by feeling love and connection with your fellow human beings, you are better at

fighting off diseases.

■ **Relieves pain:** Got a headache? Give someone a hug! It might not be quite as effective as a Panadol, but could well decrease your overall discomfort.

■ **Lowers the risk of heart disease:** Oxytocin can help reduce blood pressure, which in turn lowers the risk of heart disease.

■ **Lowers social anxiety:** Those with social anxiety would generally consider a hug the last thing they want in a social environment. It's probably the first thing they should get! A hug at the start of a social event can even make them feel more relaxed and open, rather than shy and anxious.

■ **Deepens relationships:** I spent the last few weeks talking about the different Love Languages. You'd recall that for some people, touch is an incredible way to express and understand love. Take a moment to hug your partner every time they come home after all those long hours at work. Just six seconds out of your day to rest, recharge, and connect with your loved one is all you need to help de-stress, relax, and reaffirm your love.

■ **Helps mothers bond:** Oxytocin is released during childbirth and breastfeeding. Not only does it create strong bonds between adults, it helps create and strengthen the connection between mother and child. The relaxing element of oxytocin also makes breastfeeding easier. (I don't know how as I did not find that easy!)

■ **Reduces stress and helps you sleep better:** Anxiety relief, social bonding, resilience to disease – all combined lead to a reduction in your overall stress levels, and improved ability to sleep.

All from a hug.

As Christmas draws near, the arms are out and the hugs in-bound, will you feel like running away or turning your cheek? Take a moment to appreciate all the benefits your overenthusiastic family member is about to give you with their warm embrace.

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