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Why Cuddles Work Wonders

Every man knows that the way to a woman's heart is through cuddling. If the guy leaves after lovemaking, or if he stays and cuddles through the night, can mean the difference between her regarding him as a one-nighter, or a keeper. And since the beginning of time, guys have wondered, "what is it with women and cuddling?"

Well, it turns out there's a surprising scientific reason that no one expected. Normal touching is sensed through one network of nerves, while cuddling is registered through a totally different sensory process.

Normal touching is relayed to the brain through *myelinated fibers*, a fast-working system of nerves operating at 60 metres per second. This is the system that all of us are familiar with. You feel a slight of an insect on your arm, and you react immediately.

The Cuddling Network of Fibers

However, now scientists (in an article published in *Nature Neuroscience*), have identified a different, slow-moving system that is composed of *unmyelinated fibers*, whose function were previously unknown. Instead of operating at 60 meters per second, these fibers operate at only *one* meter per second! In fact, this extremely slow speed leads scientists to theorize that this sensory information is probably used for unconscious input.

It Hits the Brain In the Right Spot

Further testing has revealed that this slow, unconscious input activates an emotional area of the brain called the *insular region of the cerebral cortex*. (This insular cortex region is the same emotional area as referred to in the *Love At First Sight – Not an Emotion, Rather a Motivation* article.)

In conclusion, scientists speculate that activating this slow-acting system through subtle stroking and caressing stimulates the releasing of *oxytocin* – a love hormone that brings feelings of wellbeing and contentment. (For more on oxytocin, see the article: *The Brain Chemistry of Sexual Bonding*.)

So guys, next time you put on the cuddles to win over that woman, it'll be our little secret.

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Sources: Unmyelinated Tactile Afferents Signal Touch and Project to Insular Cortex
Nature Neuroscience 5, 900 - 904 (2002)