

# Don't Be Afraid to Cry



Most people say they feel better after a good cry, and tears of joy, sadness, or relief may be a very healthy outlet for stress. Tears of joy, for example, relieve the intense emotions generated by happy occasions. But shedding emotional tears also seems to alleviate stress in a more subtle manner.

University of Minnesota researchers who are studying the chemical composition of tears have isolated two important chemicals, leucine-enkephalin and prolactin, in emotionally shed tears. The researchers say that leucine-enkephalin may be an endorphin, one of the natural pain relievers released by the brain in response to stress. William Frey, Ph.D., a biochemist and the leader of the research team, suspects that tears cleanse the body of substances that accumulate under stress. In other words, crying seems to be an appropriate way to respond to stress. (Tears released in response to an unemotional activity, like cutting an onion, didn't contain such chemicals.)

Conversely, to resist crying may be harmful to your health. It's possible that men develop more stress-related illness because they don't cry as freely as women do.

So if you feel like crying, let the tears flow.