

## Canadian Researcher Has Discovered Why We Like To Be Touched

(I have always been fascinated by the workings of the nervous system. These groundbreaking findings put hands-on health care on a strong footing. The research is now generating some solid physiological explanations about why and how 'touch' matters.)

It turns out we don't just learn that touch is good for us – it is hard-wired into our nervous system.

Dr. Catherine Bushnell of McGill University revealed that there is a direct physical connection between the emotional part of the brain (the limbic system) and a newly discovered network of nerves.

The nervous system is highly complex, even if you just consider its sensory components.

Dr. Bushnell's work has uncovered yet another detail of its workings and it is a finding that could have profoundly valuable implications for people who suffer with fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome and unrelenting pain.

It turns out that touch is not a simple thing. Our sensory system is made up of special nerve endings of which there are many different types. Some respond to pressure or pain, others to temperature or vibration or texture. They have names like Krause's End Bulbs or Meissner's Corpuscles or Nociceptors or Merkel's Discs.

Then there are the fibres which carry the impulses into the Central Nervous System – to the spinal cord and up to the brain where we can interpret and appreciate ( or, in the case of pain, NOT appreciate) the sensation. These fibres, or transmission cables, are described as being "fast" or "slow". Most of our fibres are of the "fast" variety and until recently we understood very little about the "slow" system.

In 1990, researchers first discovered that much of the human body's surface is densely innervated by a particular type of "slow" nerve fibres which we now know are connected directly to the emotional centres of our brain.

In order to understand this "slow" system, the researchers needed to study someone who had no "fast" one. Dr. Bushnell and her associate got their chance in 1999. A Montreal woman lost her "fast" fibre system to a rare inflammatory condition. She had no sensation of touch on her arms and legs and, if she couldn't see them, she had no awareness that they were there at all.

When the researchers stroked and massaged her limbs she could not say where they were touching her, or how. But the MRI showed the emotional centres of her brain to be lighting up like a Christmas tree! She experienced it as a “pleasurable pressure”.

The researchers speculate that because they have identified this specific type of nerves which turn touch into pleasurable emotion it could be used to counteract and perhaps override the pain system.

Stimulation of these pleasure fibres (touch in all its many forms, like a warm, soft hug) is essential for our well-being. If you are experiencing the challenges of chronic or severe or nagging pain, it should play a big part in your self-care. Hands-on health care professionals - Doctors of Chiropractic, RMT's , PT's, ND's, TCM's and bodywork of all types – can help make the difference between suffering and joy , between pain and pleasure.

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Submitted by :

Dr. Dawn Armstrong, B.Sc., D.C.