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abcd16. Why You Cry

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All humans weep, but why? One theory is that crying helps restore some kind of chemical balance. That is, tears carry away stress related byproducts. (It was discovered, sometime ago, that tears caused by onion fumes have a different chemical content than tears caused by grief.) A second theory is that crying causes physiological arousal (your blood pressure and heart rate rise) and motivates you and those around you to do something to alleviate your distress.

Recently researchers from Duke and CU Berkeley looked into all this. They showed a segment of a three-hanky film (the funeral scene in Steel Magnolias) to women whose physiological responses were extensively analyzed while they watched. It turned out that those who cried (33 out of 150) experienced greater physical stress and more sadness and pain during and after crying than those who were not moved to tears. Thus this tends to support the second theory.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't cry. On the contrary, crying is a powerful communication tool (ask the parent of an infant). Crying evokes social support. Solitary crying may have the same benefit it may help you confront painful issues and take action. Either way, a good cry can help, even if it hurts at the time.

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