

hormone

A painful sob story

CRYING brings a sense of relief to people under stress. But Dr William Frey believes there is more to it than that, writes Robert Temple. He has analysed tears and found chemicals in them which have never before been found outside the human brain and central nervous system.

The brain contains natural opiates, or pain-killers, called endorphins and Frey has found one - leucine-enkephalin - in human tears. This brain chemical pours from the eyes when a person cries. This indicates that when we cry, the brain is secreting special pain-killers. So crying appears to bring about

direct pain relief in a physical sense, rather than being just an emotional outlet.

Frey, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, also found the hormone prolactin, which regulates milk production in pregnant women. Since this hormone is secreted by the brain's pituitary gland, and is known to increase in a woman under stress, it is another indication of how closely linked crying is to the chemistry of emotional stress.

Frey studied crying in over 300 people and found that 85% of women and 73% of men felt better after crying.

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