

Listen to Your Body's Wisdom: Cry when you Need to

Think about the last time you had a good cry. Remember how good you felt afterward? Crying has been called the oat bran of the spirit and the cleanser of the soul. As it turns out, there are sound scientific reasons for that wonderful feeling of relief and calmness that follows the shedding of tears.

Though 'tis the season to be jolly, sometimes the quickest way to get to the feeling of jolliness is to first let loose with any old sadness, hurts or disappointments that have been bottled up for a while. This may be the time...

Explore your relationship with tears

To fully enjoy the emotional release that tears bring, first you must understand your relationship with tears. answer the following questions honestly:

1. Have you cried within the last year?
2. Do you cry at movies?
3. Do you cry at funerals?
4. Did you see your parents cry?
5. Do you wish you cried more?
6. Do you feel that if you started to cry you wouldn't be able to stop
7. If you see someone cry, do you believe they are weak?

If you answered "no" to questions 1,2,3, and 4 or "yes" to questions 5,6, and 7 you may be sitting on a lot of unshed tears. If you find that you can't cry over the loss of something that is important to you, chances are that you are either in denial or in shock.

When I'm moved to tears—whether it's by a movie, an emotion or an event—I pay attention. I've come to realize that if somethings has such a powerful emotional effect on me, that it's important and has something to teach me about what I value the most. The same is true for the countless women I've met in my practice and in my life.

Go ahead: Cry it "all out"

Research has shown that healthy people cry more and feel more comfortable with crying than others. When you cry, your tears release chemicals that can actually help you with pain and stress. For example, tears contain enkephalins, which can dampen emotional or physical pain, and release ACTH which has a calming effect through its action on cortisol on your adrenal glands.

Here's how to incorporate healthy crying into your life:

1. Pay attention to those things that move you to tears. Write them in your journal. They are important aspects of your inner guidance system, and can give you information about what activities and thoughts are most meaningful and precious to you. If you can, allow yourself the time and space to cry out all of your tears. After I saw the movie "Dances with Wolves", for instance, I went to bed and sobbed for several hours, allowing myself to go all the way into my feelings and then all the way back out. I emerged from the experience totally cleansed.
2. Recall the last time you cried. If you can't remember, chances are you were somehow shamed out of your tears when you were growing up by an adult who felt that crying was a sign of weakness. Though this is a particular problem for men, it is increasingly true for women as well, particularly in the corporate world. If you find yourself unable to cry at sad events or movies, write about it in your journal or talk it out with a friend. Just giving yourself permission to know this about yourself may be all that's necessary to start the healthy flow of tears once more when you feel safe.
3. Find the right balance. If you cry frequently, especially in public or with certain people, your emotions may put you at risk for not being taken seriously either socially or professionally. In addition, using tears to manipulate another will not serve you, so please check out whether or not you regularly engage in this kind of unhealthy crying and commit to making "healthy tears" a part of your life.