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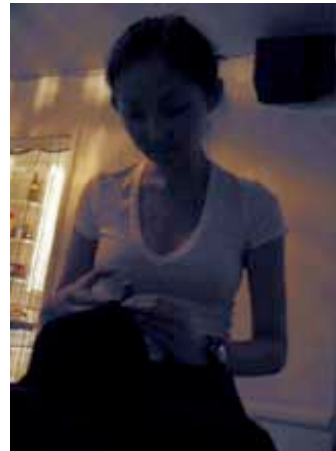
**mind + soul**

## What of the Broken Heart?

by Jovie Baclayon / Issue 65, 03-07-2005

Have you ever said, "I know it in my head, but my heart feels differently"? Don't be so hard on yourself. Breaking up is hard to do, but it has more to do with the head, not the heart, than we realize.

One broken-hearted evening while cruising the aisles of Hollywood Video, I stumbled upon a movie titled "Dopamine" and was instantly drawn to its tagline: "Love, Real or Chemical?" Having nothing better to do and hoping a depressing indie flick would make my life seem better, I watched the movie and found myself doing something totally oxymoronic: trying to rationalize my emotions.



The movie's title derives from the human neurotransmitter responsible for emotional response, pleasure and pain. Studies show that during pleasurable events like falling in love, individuals experience increased hormone levels, specifically dopamine, norepinephrine (which releases adrenaline and makes your heart thump!) and oxytocin (released during intimacy). These have the effect of producing feelings of euphoria, similar to a drug-induced high, coupled with giddiness, nervousness and difficulty concentrating. So while falling in love is one of the greatest natural highs a person can experience, conversely, breaking up is one of the most difficult withdrawals, negatively affecting your mind and body.

A study published in December 2004 in the [American Journal of Psychiatry](#) concluded that when a romantic relationship ends, women experience brain activity changes in areas where feelings of sadness are registered. All of the subjects were women who had experienced a romantic breakup in the four months preceding the study. Their brains were scanned once while thinking about a former partner, and again while thinking about a different person. The study found that during depression, the brain doesn't process

### OH, MY ACHING HEART Tips to go from feeling to healing.

Be good to your body: eat healthy foods, sleep and exercise.

Let it alllllllll out! Cry, scream, bitch, stay in bed and don't care about your appearance but give yourself a reasonable cutoff date: a week, a month, whatever. After that, make a conscious decision to be happier.

Make a list of things that instantly make you happier and use it every time you feel blue.

Nurture your soul: write in a journal, spend time with good friends and take up a new activity that has always interested you, like jewelry making or yoga.

Talk or spend time with family: they love you no matter how crazy you get.

Stay busy! Your mind can only focus on one thing at a time. If you're busy doing something else, you won't have time to think about your breakup.

Do something sexy yet silly, like a strip-aerobics or a pole dancing class! It will make you remember the desirable siren within.

Have patience. Time really does heal all wounds.

### TOOLS

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sadness, separation and grief like it normally does, thus preventing people from moving on from the relationship.

After a breakup, women often wonder, "Does my ex feel as much pain as I do?" The answer is yes, although men and women react differently, simply because we are different creatures. Men, relationship experts say, have an easier time shifting their focus away from a failed relationship because their priorities are different: men prioritize work, while women prioritize love. This, of course, is an over-generalization, since plenty of men are ruled by emotions and a number of women are ruled by reason. One of my male friends believes that men actually have a harder time getting over relationships because they don't give their hearts away as often as women. "When a man really falls for a woman, he really falls in love, so when the relationship ends, we tend to take it harder," he says. "Women are used to processing their feelings and deal with rejection better; we don't know what to do with ours."

Physicians say that when your heart rules your head, one part of your brain is running the other: the cortex is the area controlling logical thinking, while emotions are processed by the limbic system. Women naturally have a larger limbic system, which gets them more in touch with their feelings but also more susceptible to depression. Emotional negativity causes the system to become inflamed, or overactive, causing depression, laziness and mood swings.

Psychologists believe that withholding or denying your emotions is a defense mechanism used to protect the ego, which gets bruised during a breakup. But doing this puts a burden on the cortex, which is not meant to process deep emotional pain. There are five classic stages of processing grief and loss: denial, resentment, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Unfortunately, many people get stuck in one of the first four stages, and then they're unable to move on. When the pain is exorcized, equilibrium is restored in the brain, making life more pleasurable.

It sounds illogical to rationalize your emotions, since emotions are completely irrational. But it's important to know what's going on in your mind to understand what's going on in your heart. Being separated from a loved one is a painfully difficult and emotional time, and while we're in pain, our capacity for resilience is deeply hidden – but it's still there. As we pull each layer of emotion and feeling back, we move closer toward resolving the past and uncovering our innate ability to love again.

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