

## **Taking time out to enjoy the rush hours we love**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

"I FEEL dreadful", a friend was telling me the other day, having just started up a new business.

"It's a Catch-22. I feel I have to extend myself financially and in other ways, otherwise I'm not challenged enough, but then I feel consumed by all the responsibility. I want to find a happy medium," he said describing a typical day.

His time consisted of getting up at 6am (weekends included) and rushing about, making countless phone calls, seeing people, arranging things. And then the coming home at 8pm, too exhausted to play or have sex or do anything fun.

"I can hardly manage watching television, let alone getting hot and bothered," he joked.

While listening to him, I remembered the survey results published in a recent edition of .

Researchers have found a strong link between people's happiness levels and the amount of sex they have.

Happiest are those who have sex more than four times a week. They are about 6 per cent of the population. Unhappiest are the 22 per cent of people who didn't have sex at all in the previous year, according to the survey conducted by the US National Bureau of Economic Research.

Apparently, happiness research is an emerging new field in this consumer-driven society.

But it isn't just not having sex that makes people like my friend feel unhappy or deprived.

In my own research as a former sex and relationships writer, I explored the correlation between happiness and doing the things that elicit our feel-good hormones which included sex but extended to dancing, singing, hugging, playing -- fun things that turn us on and make our bodies feel alive. These are the things we forfeit in our need for money, status, and security.

Scientists have now confirmed that certain important chemicals are released when we allow ourselves to do pleasurable things.

The potent psychedelic drug DMT -- used by primitive cultures to commune with the divine -- found in certain plants, has recently been found in the pineal gland during intense activities such as birth, near-death, deep meditation and relaxation, but also in extreme sports, passionate sex, and during ecstatic singing and dancing.

When these chemicals are present in the brain we are transported into magical realms. Deep breathing from doing pleasurable activity can promote nitric oxide, which triggers endorphins and feel-good hormones, as does laughter.

Our legs alone can trigger cortisol and norepinephrine rushes due to the fight-or-flight responses of our primate ancestors. Running, for instance, produces an array of euphoric and stimulatory chemicals.

Meanwhile, sex is proven to be a major intoxicant, which is why so many people feel fantastic when they are having it.

Scientists at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in Washington in 1998, declared that making love produces a powerful chemical cocktail.

According to prominent anthropologist at Rutgers University in New York, Dr Helen Fisher, who wrote *Anatomy of Love*, there are two different types of chemicals the body releases when we set our eyes on a partner that our subconscious mind decides we want to "procreate" with.

These chemicals are amphetamines and opiates.

During the first flush of passion -- what we describe as "falling in love" -- we experience quite literally a feeling of falling, as the body succumbs to a rush of chemicals with a similar structure to amphetamines or speed. These include adrenalins, dopamine, norepinephrine and especially phenylethylamine (PEA).

Such a hit has been described as the rose-colored glasses that biology provides to get us over the psychological hurdles of pair-bonding.

But it also goes a long way to helping us understand sexual addiction, and why people becoming hooked on the feel-good rush that new sex can create.

After a period of time with a partner, the brain steps up production of endorphins and opiates according to a Time magazine article on love. These are nature's pain killers.

Whereas amphetamines get a person hyped up, opiates such as oxytocin (and the male equivalent vasopressin) inspire bonding and bliss. They are apparently released during sex with a longer-term partner, and have a soothing effect on the body. Possibly biology's way of helping us stay put to procreate.

The point is, we feel wonderful when we make love, dance, sing, exercise, play, meditate and become ecstatic -- in other words when we get the feel-good rush that we biologically seem to need. Which is why we have to balance our work and family life with our private needs.

My friend says that with a family and a new business he simply cannot find time to do anything more than collapse and sleep. But I suggested he consider the notion of delegating -- putting on staff to do things, not brilliantly, but well enough to allow for free time. That he spend money to buy himself some freedom.

He nodded in agreement because delegating does make sense. And let's face it, when we are flush with the feel-good hormones that pleasure inspires, we are going to be more efficient at work and happier at home. Taking play seriously is a great investment.

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