

# The Scientific Reason You Hate Valentine's Day

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*Photo: Kristina Strasunske / Getty Images*

It's that time of year—everything, from balloons to peanut butter cups, is heart-shaped. Valentine's Day is near. And although the holiday causes *some* people to bubble up with joy like the water in a heart-shaped hot tub, others cringe when they see February 14 on the calendar. Chances are if you clicked on this story, you're in that latter group.

You're not alone. An *Elite Daily* survey of 415 millennials found that 28 percent of women and 35 percent of men felt apathetic toward Valentine's Day.

There are myriad reasons we love to hate February 14, explains Laurie Essig, Ph.D., a sociology professor at Middlebury College and the author of *Love, Inc.: Dating Apps, the Big White Wedding, and Chasing the Happily Everafter*.

Sure, commercialism is part of it. But when people feel bad about Valentine's Day, it's usually because of the high expectations the day sets—both for those who are single and waiting for the guy or girl of their dreams to come along and for those in relationships, too. "Even if you've met 'the one,' you still have to deal with monster storms and harsh realities in the world," says Essig. "Valentine's Day is this weird yearly promise, and some of us feel disenchanting by it."

This disillusionment can be explained, in part, by science. Yes, there are some \*legit\* reasons for disliking Valentine's Day besides just being grouchy or jaded. Here, we break down a few of the reasons—and offer solutions for overcoming the logic behind why you cringe at the mere thought of love during this time of year.

## Neurochemicals In Your Brain

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Oxytocin is the so-called love hormone, and it's produced mostly in the hypothalamus. The neurochemical binds to neurons in the brain and helps to increase social bonding, romantic attachment, and empathy.

Scientists have found that how much oxytocin each person releases is tied to genes—women tend to release more oxytocin than men, explains Paul Zak, Ph.D., a neuroeconomist at Claremont Graduate University in California. This is in part because testosterone inhibits oxytocin release, creating "dominance mode" rather than "attachment mode."

How much of the "love hormone" is released is also tied to your personality—people who are more agreeable and empathetic release a lot of oxytocin, Zak explains. But this can also change day by day, depending on your mood and external factors. "There are people who don't release as much oxytocin after a positive social interaction, say a hug or a compliment," he explains. "These people could be having a really bad day. Stress inhibits the brain from making as much oxytocin, from a cellular level," he explains. "So yes, some people are just not going to be able to enjoy V-Day, in part, because of this."

But that doesn't mean these people can't do things to try to increase oxytocin in the brain.

**What to do:** Zak says that if you're looking to change your attitude about the holiday, the best way to feel the love (and the oxytocin) is to give it to your partner (if you're in a relationship), parent, pet, or friend. You get what you give when it comes to the hormone. "It's very difficult for individuals to increase their own oxytocin, but they can give that gift. If you give those around you love and attention, it motivates them to give the same to you," says Zak.

There are other science-backed ways to change the way your neurochemicals bind to your neurons to produce more oxytocin, like a "brain reset," says Zak. "You could sit in a hot tub to relax (warm temp raises oxytocin), meditate, take a walk with someone, or do something exciting and scary with a partner to burn off the stress and stimulate oxytocin: Ride a roller coaster! Take a helicopter ride!" Or try a new workout with your significant other. (The [post-workout sex benefits](#) are worth it.)

Even if you're single, trying these things with friends and family can help get your oxytocin up and your stress (and maybe your V-Day hate) down.

## Your Natural Response to All That Oversharing

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This time of year tends to prompt PDA and gushing Facebook and Instagram posts. Behavior like this can trigger V-Day cynics, and one Northwestern University study may point to why.

Research from Northwestern found that people who overshared about their relationship on Facebook were less likable. Oversharing means more than just sharing the occasional picture with your loved one—it's higher levels of disclosure like, say, a play-by-play of your Valentine's Day date night. (FYI, here are five surprising way social media can help your relationship.)

And, no. It's not just curmudgeonly single people who frown on this kind of behavior—no one likes it.

"We didn't find any differences between perceivers who were single and those who were in a relationship in terms of how much they liked people oversharing relationship information," says the study's co-author, Lydia Emery. "It doesn't seem to be about single people feeling jealous or resentful—it seems that everyone dislikes oversharing."

**What to do:** While you can't totally avoid couples on the street or that overachieving boyfriend carrying the giant teddy bear onto the subway, there are steps you can take to let less of this oversharing into your life.

Do a social media detox for the month of February. Doing so might make your happier around this holiday—a study from researchers at New York University and Stanford University found that deactivating Facebook for only four weeks made people report some improvement in their happiness levels. If that sounds extreme, try limiting yourself to 10 minutes of Instagram browsing each day. (There are other benefits to limiting your screen time, too.)

## Very ~Real~ Pain from a Broken Heart

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Okay—here's the one you've been waiting for. The explosion of red and pink marketing everywhere you turn can undoubtedly spark thoughts about love within your own life. If you're dealing with a breakup or unrequited love, the holiday can trigger pain. Yes, real pain.

"Our brain doesn't give us an easy way to get away from that conflict or social isolation we feel when someone doesn't reciprocate feelings," says Zak. "And that feeling of isolation and conflict is processed the same way in the brain as physical pain is processed, through our pain matrix."

In other words, love literally hurts, and Valentine's Day can be a not-so-subtle reminder of this.

**What to do:** Zak says one of the best ways to heal this pain comes back to oxytocin. "Oxytocin is an analgesic," he says. "Many studies show it reduces pain by diminishing activity in the pain matrix."

If you're single, raising your levels by, say, having a Galentine's Day party could actually help dissipate your negative feelings toward the holiday and raise those oxytocin levels. "It's actually a smart thing to have a party and go out with your friends," says Zak. "Then go back to the drawing board for next year. People shouldn't give up [on finding love]."