
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Why do people like sad music?

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English. I'm Sam.

Neil

And I'm Neil.

Sam

Do you like sad music, Neil?

Neil

Well, when I was younger and if I had a break-up with a girlfriend I would listen to sad songs, songs which reflected my mood.

Sam

And do you still listen to those songs now?

Neil

Not so much, but I do still like them.

Sam

Well, it seems as if there might be a biological reason why some of us do like sad songs. We'll look at this topic a little more after this week's quiz question, which is about music videos. The music video has been around for a while, but in what year was MTV, the first dedicated music video channel, launched in the US? Was it...

A: 1981,

B: 1982, or

C: 1983?

Neil

Well...

Sam

What do you think, Neil?

Neil

I'm going to guess. Is it the early 1980s?

Sam

Well, yes. Care to be more specific?

Neil

Well... Well, it was a long time ago – I was just a small boy. I'm going to go for 1982.

Sam

OK, I'll have answer later in the programme. But first, more about sad songs. Professor David Huron from Ohio State University has conducted research in this area and he discussed it recently on a BBC World Service radio programme - The Why Factor. He was looking at why some people like sad music and other people really don't like it all, as he says they just **can't stand** it. He believes it's to do with a **hormone**. A **hormone** is a natural chemical in our bodies which can have an effect on various systems and also emotions. Listen out for the name of the **hormone** he mentions.

Professor Huron

One of the things that we were interested in was 'what's the difference between people who listen to sad music and who love it, and people who listen to sad music and who just **can't stand** it. In our research, it started pointing towards a **hormone** called prolactin. Now, prolactin, as you might have guessed from the name, is associated with '**lactation**' from breast-feeding. When people cry, they also release prolactin. And, there are circumstances in which prolactin seems to have this **comforting** effect.

Sam

So which **hormone** did he mention?

Neil

He talked about the **hormone** called prolactin which he said was connected to **lactation**. This is the production of milk by mammals to feed their young.

Sam

What he noted was that this **hormone** can be released when people cry and in some cases this **hormone** has a **comforting** effect. When something is **comforting**, it makes you feel better, it calms your emotions. Let's listen again.

Professor Huron

One of the things that we were interested in was 'what's the difference between people who listen to sad music and who love it, and people who listen to sad music and who just **can't stand** it. In our research, it started pointing towards a **hormone** called prolactin. Now, prolactin, as you might have guessed from the name, is associated with '**lactation**' from breast-feeding. When people cry, they also release prolactin. And, there are circumstances in which prolactin seems to have this **comforting** effect.

Sam

So, what conclusions did he make about this **hormone** and how it might be working? Professor Huron explains.

Professor Huron

So the thought was that, perhaps **what's going on** is that the people who are enjoying listening to sad music are receiving some sort of **excess** of prolactin, and people who are listening to sad music and they just find it incredibly sad and unhelpful and they just don't want to listen to it, maybe they're not getting enough prolactin when they listen to the music.

Sam

So what is happening? Or as Professor Huron said, **what's going on?**

Neil

Well, it seems quite simple, though I'm sure it's very complicated. People who like sad music are maybe getting too much prolactin or more than is normal – he describes this as an **excess of** prolactin. And maybe people who don't like sad music aren't getting enough.

Sam

So, the idea is that prolactin is a **hormone** which we find **comforting**. If our bodies release it when we hear sad music, it gives us a good feeling – but if prolactin isn't released or there isn't enough of it, we just find the sad music sad and it doesn't help to cheer us up.

Neil

I guess so, but you know emotions are funny things - it's weird to think that our feelings are caused by different natural chemicals that run around the body. Absolutely! OK, we're going to take another look at today's vocabulary but first, the answer to this week's quiz. The music video has been around for a while, but in what year was MTV, the first dedicated music video channel, launched in the US? Was it...

A: 1981,

B: 1982, or

C: 1983?

And Neil, you said...

Neil

I said it was definitely the early 80s.

Sam

Well, you're not wrong there, but which year exactly?

Neil

'82?

Sam

Ah well, you'll need to dig out a sad song to make you feel better now because the answer was 1981.

Neil

Oh dear, I can feel my prolactin levels dropping already!

Sam

I'm sure you can't! But let's move on to vocabulary. If you **can't stand** something, it means you really don't like it.

Neil

A **hormone** is one of the body's natural chemicals.

Sam

And the hormone prolactin is connected with **lactation**, which is the production of milk by mammals.

Neil

Something that is **comforting** makes you feel better emotionally.

Sam

The phrase **what's going on** has a very similar meaning to 'what's happening'.

Neil

And an **excess** of something is 'too much or a more than normal amount of that thing'.

Sam

Well, before you have an **excess** of our company, we should wrap up. Thanks for listening and we hope you'll join us again soon. As ever, don't forget that you can find more from the BBC Learning English team online, across social media and on our very own app! Bye for now!

Neil

Goodbye!

VOCABULARY

can't stand

have a strong dislike of

hormone

a natural chemical produced in the body

lactation

the process in mammals of producing milk

comforting

calming and soothing, making you feel better emotionally

what's going on

what's happening

an excess of

too much or a more than normal amount of something