

WHO'S CRYING NOW?

This column sponsored by:



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"Big girls don't cry. Be a man and stop that crying. Dry those eyes and put a smile on your face." Have you heard these lines? Have you said them or something like them to kids or friends? How about these statements? "A good cry will cure just about anything. Go ahead cry it out. Nothing wrong with a few tears." So are we sniveling babies if we cry when we are sad, angry, tired or happy? Or, are we stronger and healthier if we open up the waterworks when we experience emotional life challenges?

Lets begin by understanding tears. We produce about 10 ounces of tears a day or 30 gallons a year. They can be basal tears, reflex tears, or emotional tears.

- Basal tears form a thin coating of 3 layers that cover the eye and keep dirt and debris away from the surface. If our eyes get dehydrated our vision becomes blurry. Basal tears prevent dehydration of our eyeball and improve our vision.
- Reflex tears are released in large amounts to wash away harmful substances and contain antibodies that defeat microorganisms attacking the eye. Tears contain the fluid Lysozyme; also found in human milk, semen, mucus and saliva. Lysozyme kills 90 to 95% of all bacteria in 5 to 10 minutes. Reflex tears are the ones we shed when our eyes sting from peeling onions or stepping too close to a smoking campfire.

- Emotional tears roll down our cheeks when we feel intense emotions or feel out of control. Increased heart rates and slower breathing accompany them. Emotional tears contain stress releasing hormones as well as an endorphin chemical that is a natural painkiller. These compounds enable us to feel calmer as we cry.

Why do we shed those emotional tears? Emotional crying is a uniquely human behavior. Other primates and some mammals cry if we define it more generally as a way to communicate distress. Think of whimpering puppies or baby chimpanzees separated from their parent, But the fountain of tears that defines the experience of weeping is a human behavior. Author fudith Kay Nelson suggests the response of crying is rooted in early childhood and a child's relationship with their main caregiver. For a child crying is a natural way to get attention, feel safe, get needs met, and be comforted when hurt or scared. If the caregiver responded in a positive caring way the child may grow up to feel comfort when they cry. It is a self-soothing experience. For children whose caregiver was negative and responded with anxiety, frustration or anger (Quit that blubbering you big baby or I will give you something to cry about!) crying may feel uncomfortable or shameful. We cry as a way to respond to our emotions, to get positive attention or support, and because it releases chemicals that

enable us to feel improved mood. Studies indicate between 80-90% of people report they feel better after crying.

When streaming tears become a flood beware of drowning! Tears are not always a solution. If crying is constant and results in feeling the same or worse it may be a sign of more serious issues. People suffering from depression, anxiety, or mental illnesses cry with little relief. People confused about the source of their emotions may not find clarification from crying. It is helpful to seek guidance from a qualified therapist to understand the underlying causes.

We cry because it is innately human. It is not for everyone and if we breakdown in an awkward situation it can be humiliating. However, most of the time crying enhances both our body and our mind.

"We need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth."
Charles Dickens

"There is sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."
Washington Irving

Happy holidays from all of us at ACS, We hope you will have a wonderful New Year.