

Dopamine



This chemical has many functions in the brain. One of these is to give a feeling of intense energy and exhilaration when we pitch into demanding activities or take risks. The number of **dopamine** receptors in the reward centre of the brain declines in adolescence, so that young people need high levels of excitement. This encourages them to be bold. The **dopamine** reward creates habits of behaviour, which can be either good or bad.

Dopamine's release can also be artificially triggered by stimulants such as alcohol, nicotine and recreational drugs. When over-stimulated, the brain learns to become resistant, needing more for the same effect and so creating addiction.

Sex is one of the strongest generators of the **dopamine** reward. A couple in love are excited and confident, and prepared to take risks so that they can share their lives and live together. The sexual act then seals their love and keeps them loyal to each other. Sex indulged in lightly can trap people into wanting it for its own sake. The desire for bonding remains unsatisfied, so that there is an increasing need for excitement in sexual performance.

"Mum, how do you have a relationship without sex?" Josie asked. "I don't think you know what boys are like. They're not the same as when you and Dad were young."

"Boys aren't animals," Mum assured her, "and it's a big mistake, too, to think that human nature itself changes. The culture changes, yes, and you have to have the sense to cope with that, but people remain the same."

"You don't know the boys I know, then," Josie objected.

"The boys I know, and I do know some of your friends, want to enjoy themselves, but they also want to have good long-term relationships later on. It's just that society tells them that they can have both—that the sex they have now won't affect what happens in the future, which of course isn't true."

"So what do you expect me to do about that? Give them a lecture?" Josie grumbled.

"Boys know for themselves that there's more to sex than pleasure,

physical or emotional," Mum explained. "Even the most promiscuous have ideals, and the girl they dream of marrying won't be the one who throws herself at him.

"But you have to understand things from their point of view. Their sex drive is running high and they want to hold their own before their pals. They can also be scared that they're not measuring up to the girls. So by sticking to your guns you're helping them, too. And you won't be short of friends. Take a lead and enjoy life, and you'll find others follow."

"Doesn't it help, though, I mean to have some experience, so that you know what you're doing when you meet the man you want to marry? Mightn't you otherwise marry the wrong person?" Josie asked.