

Pining for lost love can be physically addictive

By Keith Perry

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It may be hard to recover after grieving for a loved one because the human brain becomes addicted to pining, neurologists have discovered.

Scientists say pining for lost love can turn into a physically addictive pleasure and have dubbed the condition the "Miss Havisham effect" after the jilted bride in the Charles Dickens' novel, *Great Expectations*.

While it is natural to feel devastated when a loved one leaves or dies, many people never manage to move on from their grief and feel it over and over again for years.

Investigators at the University of California, Los Angeles, claim they have found the key to the Miss Havisham effect.

Long term grief activates neurons in the brain's reward centres which may prompt an addiction-like response.

The report, in *NeuroImage*, compared the brains of 23 women who had lost sisters or mothers through cancer: 12 had gone through the normal grieving process normally while 11 had got stuck, feeling "complicated grief".

They were shown pictures of their lost relation while their brains were scanned. Both groups showed activation in the pain regions of their brains but only those stuck in grief had raised activity in the nucleus accumbens, which plays a part in both reward and forming social attachment.

Mary-Frances O'Connor, the lead researcher, says that this reward system helps to keep our bonds strong with current lovers or living loved ones.

"Those who adapt to their loss stop getting this reward. But those who don't adapt continue to crave it because each time they see a cue, they still get that neural reward."

She hopes that the research may lead to the development of better therapies for "stuck grief".

Story from Telegraph News:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/2211085/Pining-for-lost-love-can-be-physically-addictive.html>

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