

WHY DOES IT HURT AND HOW DO I FIX IT?

A dive into the physical and mental effects of heartbreak

BY MASON FALOR

Hearthbreak is a damn-ing inevitability every person faces at some point in their life; it could be the death of a loved one, losing a dream you held onto or grieving the death of a relationship.

When we experience heartbreak, we're experiencing a form of trauma which ignites a fight or flight response. Our body responds in interesting ways as this leads to a slew of symptoms that we can feel in our chest, our head, our stomach. Because of this, we seek out ways to mitigate and limit the pain.

I have known heartbreak to place extreme levels of stress on my body and I cannot sleep or eat properly. This came up again recently, and for someone who is used to bruises and cuts from a decade of martial arts, I was confused why my body responds the way it does and also about how to handle it.

Like any good son I reached out to someone to help me with this — my dad, Derrek Falor, who conveniently is a practitioner and mental skills coach at Seattle-based Thrive: Excellence in Sports Performance. He notes that grief triggers alterations in the levels of these chemicals in our brains which in turn causes changes in how our body reacts.

These reactions, he says, come down to the body's regulation of dopamine and serotonin, chemicals which regulate sleep, mood and other bodily functions.

He put me in touch with Lee Arakawa, who has a Ph.D. in psychology and also works at Thrive, to chat some more about my questions on the effect of heartbreak. "We can't separate the mind from the body or, in that case, the heart from the body — the emotions," Arakawa says.

He notes the connection between the mind-body response, which can have many different reactions in people, but notes that heartbreak can often lead to tightness in the chest, restlessness or an inability to sleep, lack of appetite and even physical weakness.

Arakawa describes this as a crisis within ourselves that can last for an undetermined amount of time.

"Why is it that a person might stay in that fight or flight response for an extended period of time? Well,

it just depends on a number of factors," Arakawa says. "What are their coping skills or mechanisms? Do they have the appropriate support around them?"

He says, "In some cases, the idea of loss can be so great that they don't want to face it, and they would rather be in denial."

Fundamentally, there is a chemical connection between the mind and the body. Otherwise, we wouldn't work. We can find real-world examples of mental afflictions having real time effects on the body. These can be depression and its connection to stress or anger and tensing your body so much you become sore.

Arakawa says there is "no timeline" for dealing with the hurt. How people go about it changes per person, as does how they're feeling.

He also says there is a wrong way to deal with it, "like, over-correcting, you can try to go just way too far in the other direction, burying yourself in other sexual partners, looking for any sense of desire, fulfillment and obviously, there's substance abuse."

However, healing heartbreak isn't an exact science unlike knowing the chemicals that cause it. Arakawa reiterates "We all have our own response to grief, we all have our own timeline for it."

'We can't separate the mind from the body or, in that case, the heart from the body — the emotions.'

— LEE ARAKAWA, SPORT PSYCHOLOGY COACH

University Theatre tickets.uoregon.edu/UT

TICKETS
General Admission \$10
UO Faculty & Staff \$8
UO Students FREE with UO ID

University Theatre Presents
POTUS
BY Selina Fillinger

FEBRUARY Hope Theatre
Miller Theatre Complex
7 • 8 • 14 • 15 • 16* • 20 • 21 • 22 • 23*
7:30 PM EVENINGS • 2:00 PM MATINEES*

DIRECTED BY Trissa Rodley

THE LONG GAME FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS PANEL DISCUSSION
Saturday, February 22 • 9:30–10:30 pm • Hope Theatre

Join us for a post-show panel with politically minded women active in our community, including Lisa Fragala, Kaarin Knudsen, Lyndie Leech, Dawn Lesley, Kori Rodley, Claire Syrett, Laurie Trieger, and Jennifer Yeh. Light snacks provided.

OSHER
LIFELONG
LEARNING
INSTITUTE

At the University of Oregon

SATURDAY SEMINARS

Led by experts, surrounded by motivated peers, our seminars offer access to a dynamic, noncredit university experience.

The Natural History of the American West
Saturdays, February 22 and March 1, 8, and 15; 9:30 a.m.–noon

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman
Saturdays, March 29 and April 5, 12, and 19; 9:30 a.m.–noon

Epic, Comedy, Tragedy
Saturdays, April 26 and May 3, 10, and 17; 9:30 a.m.–noon

Advance registration is required: \$150 per each four session seminar. All seminars are held in-person at the UO Baker Downtown Center in Eugene.

osher.uoregon.edu/seminars
541-346-4231

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON | Continuing and Professional Education

EO/AA/ADA institution committed to cultural diversity. cpe33763