New Western-led research says pausing to think about your romantic partner generates 'good stress' and adds an energy boost to your day. The study, Energized by love: Thinking about romantic relationships increases positive affect and blood glucose levels, was published recently in the journal, Psychophysiology.

The research team, led by Sarah Stanton from Western's Department of Psychology, tracked blood glucose (or blood sugar concentration) levels in 183 participants before and after they thought about their current romantic partner and discovered both a rise in glucose and positive mood for a short period of time. When participants were asked to think about a friend or their morning routine, there was actually a slight decline in blood glucose levels and no link to positive affect.

Stanton, a graduate student, and her collaborators, which include Western Social Psychology professor Lorne Campbell, say the discovery is linked to eustress (good, euphoric stress), the opposite of distress (bad stress), and believe the findings will help psychologists better understand interpersonal relationships and relationship processes.

"Essentially, love gives you a 'rush' both physically and psychologically," Stanton said. "The 'stress' of love is linked with positive emotions, not negative emotions of any kind."

The study is an extension of previous findings by researchers that found romantic partner reflection stimulates increases in cortisol levels but, by demonstrating a link between a physical stress response (glucose increase) and positive mood, this study is the first to provide concrete empirical support of eustress in response to partner reflection.

Stanton, Campbell and Timothy Loving from the University of Texas at Austin also demonstrated that individuals can experience eustress even after being together with a romantic partner for a considerable amount of time, which is contrary to previous research assumptions that eustress occurs mostly within the first six months of a relationship.

There are also benefits for healthy living, as prior research has shown that positive emotions can buffer individuals against potential physical and mental health illnesses, like depression, anxiety, and self-consciousness.


Provided by University of Western Ontario