

Want to make friends with a Chimpanzee? Share your food with it, say scientists who discovered 'happy chemicals' are released when they feed together

- Researchers found levels of 'happy' chemicals were boosted when food was shared among chimps
- Say process could be a key part of bonding for the animals

By [Mark Prigg](#)

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A new study found that friendships really are forged at mealtimes, at least for some of our closest living relatives.

Scientists from Germany, Switzerland, Britain and the United States have found that chimps who share their food have higher levels of oxytocin, known as the love hormone, than those who don't.

Oxytocin has previously been linked to bonding between mothers and their breastfeeding babies, both in primates and humans.



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CHIMP FRIENDS THINK ALIKE

Researchers suggest that being close to others with similar personality traits goes back millions of years.

They found the phenomenon occurs not only in people but also in chimpanzees.

This indicates its origins date to when humans and the apes had a similar evolutionary path before going their separate ways.

The last common ancestor of chimps and humans lived at least six million years ago, indicating the first 'best friends' walked the Earth all that time ago, said Austrian and Swiss researchers.

They studied colonies of chimpanzees in two Dutch zoos and firstly rated their personality traits.

Researchers studying dozens of wild chimpanzees in Uganda found that the giver and the receiver of food had higher levels of oxytocin in their urine, indicating that sharing is something that makes both parties feel good.

Roman Wittig of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, said chimpanzees had more than twice the level of oxytocin after sharing food than after mutual grooming - another important bonding behavior in primates.

'We think food sharing can help spark new friendships, whereas grooming is more for confirmation of existing relationships,' he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Julia Lehmann, an evolutionary anthropologist who wasn't involved in the study, called the results 'very clear and highly significant.'

They appear to support the idea that food sharing can extend social benefits normally found in animals who are related to each other to those dining partners who aren't related, she said.

In other words, the way to a chimp's heart is through its stomach.

'I also find it very interesting that the direction of the food sharing does not affect the results, i.e. it is not better to receive than to give - or the other way around - at least not in terms of oxytocin level,' said Lehmann, an academic at Roehampton University in Britain.



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Making friends: Researchers studying dozens of wild chimpanzees in Uganda found that the giver and the receiver of food had higher levels of oxytocin in their urine, indicating that sharing is something that makes both parties feel good

The research was conducted on wild chimpanzees because researchers weren't sure that animals in captivity would react the same way to oxytocin, said Wittig.

Their caution results partly from studies in humans, where children who grew up in institutions sometimes struggle to form normal bonds later in life.

While no studies have yet been conducted on oxytocin levels in humans after dinnertime, Wittig said the principle would suggest a similar effect.

"We've known for decades that human mothers and breastfeeding children both have an oxytocin surge. And if we consider breastfeeding to be a form of food sharing then there's a similar mechanism in humans."

The study was published Wednesday in the journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B.



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[ohara](#), Jupiter, United States, 8 hours ago

Actually, I don't like chimpanzees. So I certainly wouldn't share any food or anything else with them.

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[CaliforniaGirl](#), Palo Alto, 8 hours ago

Is this a reason as to why there is so much misery in the human world --- not enough sharing? That if we shared our food (and I also wonder whether the elevation in oxytocin levels extend to other types of sharing as well) that we would all be a lot happier! It is assumed that misery is only experienced by the have-nots, but implied here is that those who can afford to share, and do not, miss out on good feelings that could have otherwise experienced, but didn't, while wrongfully thinking that hoarding the goods would lead to greater happiness.

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[Rae S.](#), Missisippi, United States, 9 hours ago

Who would of guessed?

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