



Seven Amazing Things About Our Sense of Touch

By Claudia Hammond, presenter of
The Touch Test and All in the Mind



Don't underestimate the power of touch. It can convey emotion faster than words, shape our relationships, influence our decisions, and affect how we feel - yet touch is one of the most under-researched senses.

To explore it further, BBC Radio 4 collaborated with the Wellcome Collection and psychologists at Goldsmiths, University of London to launch The Touch Test. Here are seven fascinating insights they uncovered:

1. Touch Is the First Sense to Develop

In the womb, touch develops before hearing, smell, or taste. Twins have even been observed reaching out to touch each other. After birth, skin-to-

skin contact, or "kangaroo care," helps babies feel calmer and sleep better.

2. The Skin Is the Body's Largest Sense Organ

Covering over two square metres, human skin is packed with sensors that detect pressure, vibration, temperature, pain, and pleasure. These sensors adapt quickly - which is why we usually stop noticing the feeling of clothes soon after putting them on (unless they're itchy!).

3. Human Touch Reduces Stress - In Babies and Adults

A 2003 study showed that holding hands and hugging before a stressful task significantly reduced heart rate and blood pressure. Physical touch helps us regulate stress responses - not just in infants, but in adults too.

4. Our Skin Has Different Nerve Fibers for Different Touches

Fast fibers respond to sharp touches and send signals to the somatosensory cortex. Slow fibers respond to gentle, emotional touch and send signals to the insular cortex, which also processes taste and emotion.

5. Even a Simple Touch Can Communicate Emotion

In studies, strangers could correctly interpret emotional intent - such as love, gratitude, or anger - up to 83% of the time from just a touch on the arm.



touch products. High-need-for-touch shoppers are even known to open packages just to feel the contents.



6. Cultural Norms Shape How and When We Touch

We adjust touch based on social settings. A study of airport lounges showed 60% of people used physical touch when meeting or saying goodbye.

7. Touch Still Matters in the Digital Age

Despite online shopping, 91% of purchases are still made in physical stores - partly because we want to

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on BBC Radio 4:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000n5>
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