

The tango embrace

When one thinks of Argentine Tango, the first thought that comes to mind is passion. Appealing and daunting all at once. But there is more, much more to Argentine Tango. Its biggest secret is the embrace, the Tango embrace. It is unique, not comparable to any other embrace, scary and addictive. Bliss in many ways. It is not sexual in nature and yet speaks of an intimacy that few people experience in the regular course of their lives. It is heaven when well executed and misery when badly done. Experienced lady dancers will tell you: Tango embrace defines the quality of the dance. There is another tidbit of information that you may want to know about the Tango embrace: it lasts for several uninterrupted minutes.

Argentine Tango songs are generally around 3-minute long. When we dance Argentine Tango in Milongas (Argentine Tango dance party), we generally dance three or four songs in a row (called a tanda or set) with the same partner. Hence we embrace, or hug, a partner for 9 to 12 minutes with 2 or 3 interruptions of 15 seconds or so.

If this does not signify to you, then let me put my discourse about Argentine Tango on the side for a brief moment and tell you about embraces and hugs as modern science look at them. Did you know that there are numerous studies about the benefit of a human hug?

Hugs can improve mood, fight depression, reduce stress, improve our self-confidence (!), stimulate our immune system and much more. When we talked in our last article about the healing power of the tango embrace, we meant it literally.

Let's dive into the more technical aspect of science so you may see how a hug can impact so many different aspects of our beings:

As you may know, our bodies are a fine tuning of hormonal regulation and autonomic nervous activities (sympathic and parasympathetic systems). Studies indicate that hugs can raise the levels of the three-feel-good hormones (oxytocin*, dopamine* and serotine*) and reduce the level of cortisol, a stress hormone. They can also activate the part of the brain that controls the nerve of the parasympathetic system (vagus). Hence hugs are able to affect both our hormonal regulation and our autonomic nervous system thereby controlling our moods, stress levels, heart rhythm, blood pressure, immune system and more.

However, not all hugs have the same impact on our bodies. For example,

- A 10-second hug helps the body fight infections, eases depression, and lessens tiredness.
- A 20-second hug does what a 10-second hug does and beyond, also reduces the harmful effects of stress, relieves blood pressure, and ensures a healthy heart.

In other words, the effect of a hug is tied to its duration (and the quality of the hug too). While it was found that the average hug lasts 3 seconds or less, hugs are most effective at 20 seconds. So imagine the benefit of an Argentine Tango hug that last in average some 3 minutes!

Research has shown that a proper deep [long] hug may give an individual the following benefits:

- It builds trust and a sense of safety, thereby promoting open and honest communication.
- It helps in healing some negative feelings such as loneliness, isolation, and anger.
- It boosts self-esteem in addition to making us feel safe and loved
- It helps us feel more self-confident and happier.
- It alleviates the existential fear of a person by reducing the worry of mortality
- It strengthens the immune system through activation of the thymus.
- It reduces stress, help relax and lower anxiety.
- It relaxes the muscles by releasing tension in the body.
- It can take away/reduce pain and aches by increasing circulation into the soft tissues.
- It lowers blood pressure. (Apparently when hugs release the cuddle hormone (oxytocin), it results in lowering anxiety which in turn effectively lower blood pressure).
- It boosts heart health and decrease heart rate in stressful situations.
- Increase in hug ratio results in reduced blood pressure, decreased cortisol, improved healing, reduced cravings, and better immunity
- It activates our parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS), which, when activated, slows our heart and breathing rates, lowers blood pressure and promotes digestion. Our body enters a state of relaxation, and this relaxation breeds recovery.

The Tango Embrace is of the quality (deep) and duration (over 20 seconds) needed to bring about all the healthy benefits listed above. Additionally, the Tango Embrace is codified. There is a place for each arm and there is a way to lay one's hand on the partner's body. There is no room for unwanted touch or inappropriate body contact. Additionally, AT dancers embrace primarily, and most time exclusively, for the sake of the dance. Therefore AT provides a safe environment to receive and give hugs, not only for 20 seconds but in fact for hours. You may dance in a Milonga for 3 to 5 hours and be hugged and hug back in groups of 3-minute-long embrace.

We do not aim at creating a new record of hug's duration (apparently 36 hours, 36 minutes, and 36 seconds set in 2018) but just at enjoying a wonderfully fulfilling dance with the added benefit of safe, long-lasting, quality hugs given and received without having to battle with sexual innuendos.

Are you still here?

I thought that you had gone to sign for your Argentine Tango classes!

*Footnote for those interested:

Dopamine: It is the pleasure hormone that makes an individual feel good.

Serotonin: It is the antidepressant hormone that elevates mood, controls anxiety, and reduces feelings of loneliness.

Oxytocin: It is the love hormone that relieves stress and boosts heart health. It also helps in losing weight, lowers blood pressure, fights diseases, increases libido, reduces stress, and gives us a feeling of comfort.