

## What goes on in the brains of science nerds?

Do you get really stimulated by new ideas and imaginative scenarios?

If so, you may have an influx of dopamine in your synapses, but not where we traditionally think of this neurotransmitter flowing.

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Dopamine is often labeled the “feel-good molecule,” but this is a gross mischaracterization of this neurotransmitter. As personality neuroscientist Colin DeYoung (a close colleague of mine) notes, dopamine is actually the “[neuromodulator of exploration](#).” Dopamine’s primary role is to make us want things, not necessarily like things. We get the biggest rush of dopamine coursing through our brains at the possibility of reward.

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[D]opamine pathways in the brain have been proposed that are strongly linked to the [reward value of information](#). People who score high in the general tendency toward exploration are not only driven to engage in behavioral forms of exploration, but also tend to get energized through the possibility of discovering new information and extracting meaning and growth from their experiences. These “cognitive needs,” as the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow referred to them, are just as important as other human needs for becoming a whole person.

How active is your nerdy dopamine pathway?

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