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Front Page ▶ UK News ▶ International ▶ City ▶ Money ▶ Sport ▶ Football ▶ Features ▶ Review  
 Search ▶ Feedback ▶ Crossword ▶ Weather ▶ Matt ▶ Alex ▶ Opinion ▶ Obituaries ▶ Site Map  
 Technology ▶ Books ▶ Travel ▶ Schools ▶ Teenagers ▶ Students ▶ Gallery ▶ Classified ▶ Jobs

3 GREAT VIDEOS

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## Scent tells men when women are fertile

By Roger Highfield

### External Links

- ▶ [Publications - Royal Society](#)
- ▶ [University of Texas](#)
- ▶ [What are pheromones? - Athena Institute](#)
- ▶ [Communicating through pheromones \[Jan '98\] - American Psychological Association](#)

EVIDENCE that women have a tell-tale body odour that reveals when they are fertile has been discovered, one of several subtle clues that overturn the conventional wisdom that men cannot detect ovulation.

The find has triggered a hunt for the signalling chemical, a type of pheromone called a copulin, which could prove a boon for perfume manufacturers.

Given that women go through huge hormonal changes during their menstrual cycle, a team at the University of Texas, Austin, decided to see if there were corresponding odours associated with the different phases of the cycle.

Prof Devendra Singh, who reported the work yesterday in the Proceedings of Royal Society with Dr Matthew Bronstad, commented: "We have found that men can reliably detect the fertile phase of the cycle by body odour. Men could use ovulation-linked odours in their mate selection."

Fifty men assessed the smell of T-shirts worn by 17 women around the age of 22 and were told to see if they could tell how attractive the wearer had been by odour alone. "Each shirt was rated in terms of intensity, pleasantness and sexiness of odour, rather than the actual nature of the odour.

Prof Singh said: "Men judge the smell of a T-shirt worn by the woman during fertile phase as more pleasant and sexy than a T-shirt worn by the same woman during her non-fertile phase. These findings suggest that the human female ovulation is not totally concealed."

It had been thought that ovulation was hidden, so that "alpha males" were forced to stay with their mates to ensure they could not have a rival's child. In the light of the new work, it is thought that changes in odour profile may have been used by men in ancient times to boost the chance of conception, and to tell when it was best to guard their mate