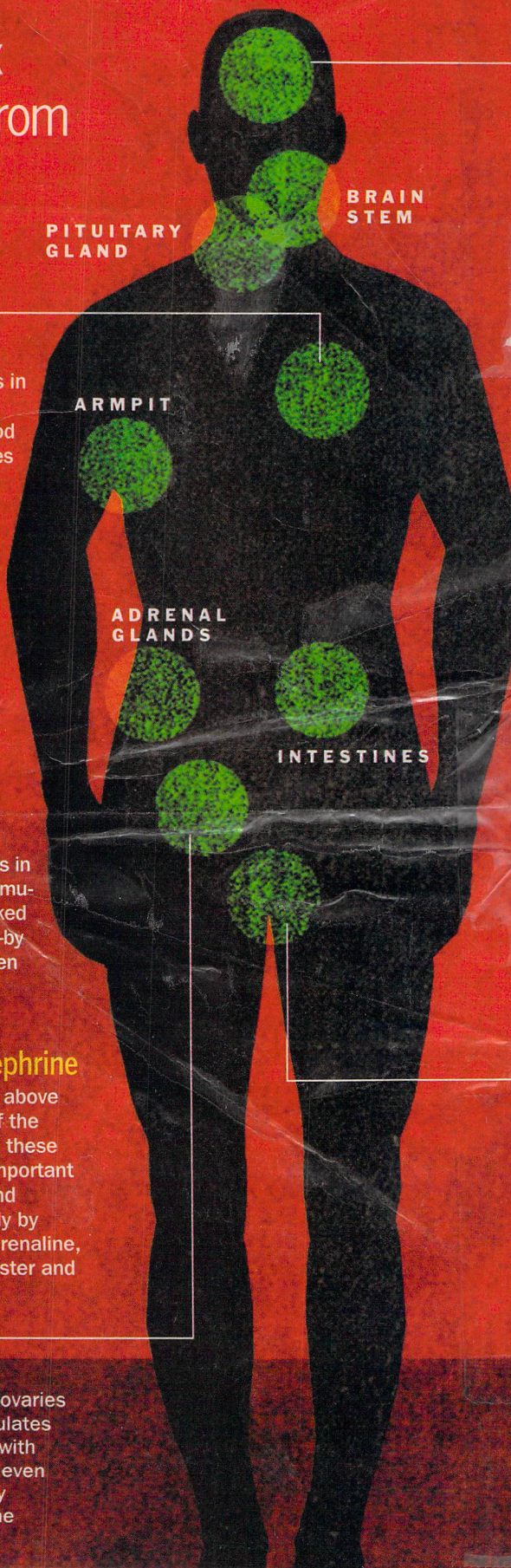


Where Our Sex Drive Comes From



HEART AND BLOOD

Nitric Oxide

When you're turned on, cells in the genital area release this chemical, which causes blood vessels to dilate and increases the flow of blood. Drugs like Viagra artificially stimulate nitric-oxide release

Vasoactive Intestinal Polypeptide

Found in a man's intestines and brain, this protein works much like nitric oxide: it opens blood vessels to enhance erection and stimulate libido

Pheromones

Scientists believe these chemicals, produced in glands in the armpits, carry sexually stimulating signals that can be picked up—but only unconsciously—by others. Pheromones have been found in animals but not yet isolated in humans

Epinephrine/Norepinephrine

Found in the adrenal glands above the kidneys, in the nerves of the spinal cord and in the brain, these neurotransmitters play an important role in facilitating arousal and orgasm. They excite the body by giving it a shot of natural adrenaline, causing the heart to beat faster and blood pressure to rise

OVARIES

Estrogen

A hormone produced in the ovaries and the brain, estrogen regulates ovulation. It's also involved with making women, and maybe even men, feel desire, possibly by stimulating the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine

CENTRAL/MIDBRAIN

Dopamine

This is probably the most important neurotransmitter involved in desire. Dopamine-producing neurons in the central part of the brain color one's perception of the outside world, creating what is experienced as a sexy mood. Dopamine levels are highly correlated with desire

Serotonin

This neurotransmitter is produced in the midbrain and brain stem and helps one experience satisfaction, including the kind people feel after an orgasm. Serotonin can increase desire—most likely by working in concert with dopamine—but, paradoxically, serotonin-boosting drugs like Prozac can also make orgasm harder to achieve

Alpha Melanocyte Polypeptide

Produced in the pituitary gland, this hormone also acts as a neurotransmitter. Injecting one version of the chemical into male test subjects triggers erections

Oxytocin

Another hormone released by the pituitary gland, ovaries and testes, oxytocin helps activate milk production, uterine contractions during childbirth and pelvic shudders in orgasms. It also contributes to the feelings that bond parents to their children

TESTES

Testosterone

Small quantities of this hormone are made in the brain, but most of it is produced in the testes and ovaries; in women it is quickly converted into estrogen. For men, it's the key hormone of desire, creating feelings of positive energy and well-being. When it's depleted, both men and women experience low libido