

## Why sitting by the fire is so relaxing: Staring at flickering light awakens our inner caveman - and even causes our blood pressure to drop

- Anthropologist from the University of Alabama believes that modern day humans' relaxing response to fire is evolutionary
- Proved our blood pressure decreases when we stare at flames
- Study showed we also become calmer and more sociable
- Effect of fire is thought to have had the same effect on ancient man
- Prehistoric people would have gathered around campfires to keep warm and make friends, which would have given them a survival advantage

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Sitting by an open fire when it's cold and wet outside is many people's idea of a perfect winter evening.

Now an anthropologist claims that this love for the hearth is deeply ingrained and borne out of evolution.

His study has shown that sitting next to a logfire causes our blood pressure to drop and leaves us feeling more at ease.

The reason for the relaxing effect harks back to prehistoric times when Stone Age man socialised around camp fires and felt safe and warm while bonding with friends, he claims.

In a [study](#) published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology*, Christopher Lynn, of the University of Alabama, said that modern day humans' relaxing response to fire is evolutionary.

In the experiment, 226 adults spent time watching a video of a fire, complete with sound effects.

Their blood pressure was taken before and after viewing the fire for various periods of time.



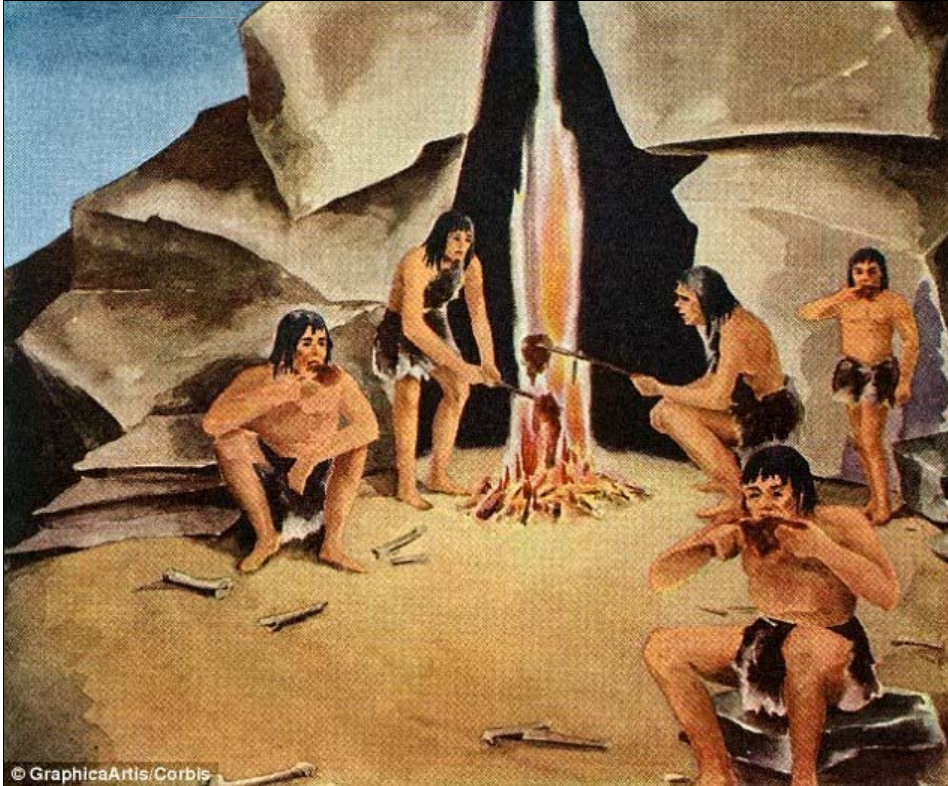
Image Source: Corbis

We have evolved to feel calmer sitting by a campfire (stock image), according to an anthropologist

Dr Lynn discovered 'consistent blood pressure decreases' across the participants and that the longer people watched the fire, the more relaxed they became.

He also said that the experience seemed to make participants become more sociable.

The study says: 'Findings confirm that hearth and campfires induce relaxation as part of a multisensory, absorptive and social experience.'



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**Modern day humans' relaxing response to fire is evolutionary. One anthropologist claims stone age man likely relaxed around campfires to 'benefit in the social milieu via fireside interactions,' meaning that they made friends around the fire and this made them feel safer – perhaps even giving them a survival advantage**

He believes this is because stone age man likely relaxed around campfires to 'benefit in the social milieu via fireside interactions,' meaning that they made friends around the fire and this made them feel safer – perhaps even giving them a survival advantage.

Early humans would have associated the flickering light, crackling sounds, warmth and distinctive smells of campfires with relaxation and friendship.

'For early humans, fire likely extended the day, provided heat, helped with hunting, warded off predators and insects, illuminated dark places, and facilitated cooking,' the study explains.

'Campfires also may have provided social nexus and relaxation effects that could have enhanced prosocial behaviour.'

### THE EXPERIMENT

A total of 226 adults spent time watching a video of a fire, complete with sound effects.

Their blood pressure was taken before and after viewing the fire for various periods of time.

It decreased after watching the fire and people became more relaxed, the longer they focused on the flames.

Watching the fire also seemed to make people more sociable.