

VR program may help soldiers avoid PTS

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A virtual reality program unveiled this week during a University of Haifa conference may help U.S. soldiers in Iraq avoid mental trauma.

"Among the syndromes the soldiers suffer from are depression, low self-image, flashbacks, and thoughts of loss," said Professor Albert Rizzo of the University of Southern California, one of the program's developers. He says early treatment aided by the VR tool can lessen the psychological damage.

The VR program helps a soldier experience fighting through a number of sensors. The soldier, explains Rizzo, puts on goggles that include earphones and sees and hears battlefield activity.

The special goggles also measure heart rate, blood oxygen level, and other medical indices relevant to a person's mental state.

"There are already a number of soldiers who returned from Iraq suffering from battle fatigue and trauma who are being treated by the VR program," Rizzo said. He estimates by the end of the year, some 200 soldiers will have used the new system.

It was the fact that one in three soldiers returning from Iraq suffers from some mental disorder that led to the development of the virtual reality battlefield for rehabilitation purposes.

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