

Letters from home may help prevent post-traumatic stress disorder in happily married soldiers

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A new study from the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* finds that for active-duty male soldiers in the U.S. Army who are happily married, communicating frequently with one's spouse through letters and emails during deployment may protect against the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms after returning home.

After studying information from 193 married male Army soldiers who returned from military deployment within the past year, investigators found that more frequent spousal communication through "delayed" communication such as letters, care packages, and emails was linked with lower PTSD symptoms after deployment, but only in soldiers with higher levels of [marital satisfaction](#). For soldiers with lower marital satisfaction, frequent communication was linked with more PTSD symptoms.

"We think this means that when soldiers are maritally dissatisfied, communication with their wives during deployment may be less positive and doesn't provide soldiers with social support that can help protect against PTSD symptoms," said co-author Ben Loew, University of Denver.

Interestingly, the benefits of communication against PTSD symptoms in happily married soldiers did not hold for "interactive" communication such as phone calls and instant messaging.

"We think that letters, which happened less often overall compared to phone calls, had stronger effects," said Loew. "When you receive letters, they can be read again and again, and when you write them, it can be therapeutic."

According to Loew, this study highlights the importance of knowing how [soldiers](#) communicate with their spouses during deployment, and how this communication could be protective or not for a soldier's mental health and marriage.

Loew and his colleagues plan to conduct more comprehensive research that could help military decision-makers as well as Army couples themselves as they think about optimal communication during deployment

Provided by Wiley

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