

New study shows PTSD symptoms reduced in combat-exposed military via integrative medicine

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Healing touch combined with guided imagery (HT+GI) provides significant clinical reductions in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms for combat-exposed active duty military, according to a study released in the September issue of *Military Medicine*.

The report finds that patients receiving these complementary medicine interventions showed significant improvement in quality of life, as well as reduced depression and cynicism, compared to soldiers receiving treatment as usual alone.

The study, led by the Scripps Center for [Integrative Medicine](#) in San Diego, Calif., conducted a [randomized controlled trial](#) of returning active-duty Marines at Camp Pendleton, Calif. from July 2008 to August 2010. Participants were separated at random into two groups, one that received treatment as usual (TAU) for PTSD and another that received TAU as well as healing touch (HT), a practitioner-based treatment aimed at eliciting the participant's own healing response, with guided imagery (GI), a self-care therapy aimed at eliciting relaxation as well as enhancing trust and self-esteem.

Significant Improvements Reported

After six sessions within a three-week period with a Scripps practitioner, the HT+GI group reported a significant improvement in PTSD

symptoms as a result of these combined complementary therapies.

The [principal investigators](#) and designers of the study are Dr. Mimi Guarneri and Rauni King, founders of the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine. The Samueli Institute of Alexandria, Va., conducted blind data analysis and authored the manuscript.

"Scores for PTSD symptoms decreased substantially, about 14 points and below the clinical cutoffs for PTSD," said Dr. Guarneri. "This indicates that the intervention was not just statistically significant, but actually decreased symptoms below the threshold for PTSD diagnosis. It made a large difference in reducing PTSD symptoms."

Study Criteria

The study included a total of 123 participants – 55 who received TAU and 68 who received HT+GI and TAU. To be eligible for the trial, participants were screened to confirm that they were currently experiencing at least one of the following PTSD symptoms: re-experiencing of trauma via flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, exaggerated emotional responses to trauma, emotional numbness, insomnia, irritability, exaggerated startle response, or avoidance of people or places that remind them of the trauma.

"Service members are seeking out non-drug complementary and integrative medicine as part of their overall care and approach to wellness," said Wayne B. Jonas, MD, president and chief executive officer of Samueli Institute. "This treatment pairs deep relaxation with a self-care approach that can be used at home. The results of this study underscore the need to make effective, non-stigmatizing treatments for PTSD available to all our service members."

Healing Touch and Guided Imagery

Healing touch is an energy-based, non-invasive treatment that restores and balances the human biofield to help decrease pain and promote healing. Healing touch is often used as an adjunct to surgery and other medical procedures to assist in pain reduction, decrease anxiety and elicit relaxation.

Guided imagery is a way of using the imagination to help a person, reduce stress, decrease pain and enhance overall well-being through visualization. For the purposes of this study, guided imagery was administered to the subjects through a recorded CD simultaneously with [Healing Touch](#) and then listed to independently by subjects at least once daily.

More information: "Healing Touch with Guided Imagery for PTSD in Returning Active Duty Military: A Randomized Controlled Trial", *Military Medicine*.

Provided by Scripps Research Institute

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