

New treatment to beat blushing

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Murdoch University researchers have discovered a cheap and effective way to reduce one of the human body's most curious expressions – blushing.

"There are people in our community who are particularly frightened of blushing because they think that people who notice the blush will think less of them," said the study's lead author Professor Peter Drummond.

"This can make them even more anxious and make them blush even more. For some, this fear is so extreme that they avoid social encounters and sometimes even seek surgery to reduce the rush of blood to the cheeks."

During the study, 30 adults were connected to special equipment to

measure [blood flow](#) in the cheeks. 16 of these people had a 'high fear of blushing'.

A small amount of ibuprofen gel was rubbed into one cheek, with ultrasound gel rubbed into the other cheek as a control. The subjects were then asked to participate in a cringe-worthy task – karaoke.

"We instructed them, one at a time, to sing along to Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* for a full five minutes," Professor Drummond said.

"To heighten their embarrassment, we interjected every now and then asking them to sing louder, be more expressive, or sing in tune."

Previous studies led the researchers to believe that blushing is partly caused by an [inflammatory reaction](#) in the [blood vessels](#) of the face, brought on by compounds called prostaglandins.

Professor Drummond said the ibuprofen gel helped stop these compounds from forming, and significantly reduced blushing (caused by [embarrassment](#)) and flushing (brought on by exercise).

"The results were even more noticeable among those with a high fear of blushing," he said.

Ibuprofen gel is commonly available in [chemists](#) and supermarkets, and is often used as an anti-inflammatory to treat sprains, swelling and back pain.

"More research is needed to determine whether topical ibuprofen gel is suitable for intermittent or long-term use to treat blushing," Professor Drummond said.

"We're also looking to test whether ibuprofen tablets, aspirin,

paracetamol or even a placebo, can deliver similar results."

Provided by Murdoch University

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