Medical Xpress

Seeing is relieving: New hope for chronic pain sufferers

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An f1000 evaluation examines how pain relief improves greatly when the sufferer can actually see the area where the pain is occurring.

In an Anglo-Italian study, thirty healthy subjects were invited to look at either their own hand, the experimenter's hand, or an object, while their hand was subjected to laser-induced pain.

The results, published in The Journal of Neuroscience, showed that, when the sufferer could see their own hand, they felt less pain than if they were looking at the experimenter's hand or a neutral object. Longo and colleagues found there were subjective (self-report) and objective (brain potential) measures of the person's pain sensation.

Researchers also found the result was the same whether the subjects were looking at their actual hand or a mirror image; the latter using a technique previously used to reduce phantom limb pain in amputees.

Importantly, this is the first time such an experiment has been done on subjects who did not suffer from pre-existing body image issues.

Faculty of 1000 reviewer Alumit Ishai, of the University of Zurich, was very impressed. "These novel findings suggest that viewing the body modulates the subjective perception of pain," she said. "Although the mechanism that mediates this analgesic effect is unclear … the potential therapeutic implications for patients with chronic pain are huge."

More information:

• The full text of the evaluation of is available free for 90 days at: www.f1000biology.com/article/v … 2c9qkc58j/id/1165244
• An abstract of the original paper by Longo et al. (Visually Induced Analgesia: Seeing The Body Reduces Pain) is at: www.jneurosci.org/cgi/content/abstract/29/39/12125

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