

A Surprising Benefit of Holding Hands



Reaching for someone's hand can do more than just provide comfort; the simple gesture can actually ease physical pain, according to one study.

Research by the University of Colorado Boulder and the University of Haifa found that in times of stress or discomfort, pain can be alleviated when touching a romantic partner.

This phenomenon is known as "interpersonal synchronization", where people physiologically mirror the person they are with. This recent study specifically looks at brain wave synchronization regarding the power of human touch associated with pain. The more empathy a partner feels, the more brain waves are likely to sync, resulting in less pain.

The study involved 22 heterosexual couples, aged 23-32, who have been together for at least a year. They were put through scenarios that compared brain activity to different levels of touch.

The results showed there was mild brain wave synchronization just by being in each other's presence, touching or not. But, when a woman was in pain and a man wasn't able to touch her, their brain waves diminished. Researchers also found that the longer the couple held hands, the more their brain waves patterned up, and the more empathy the male felt, the more synchronized their brains became.

"It appears pain totally interrupts this interpersonal synchronization between couples, and touch brings it back," said lead author Pavel Goldstein in a news release.

Goldstein stressed more studies will need to explore this concept deeper, but he explains that empathetic touch can make a person feel understood, which may activate pain-killing reward mechanisms in the brain.

Wishing you joy and good health,
Mary Bohlen RN
SJParishNurse@comcast.net