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The Checkup

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Tuesday, November 3, 2009

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In pain? Look at photos of your loved ones.

Are you facing a painful medical procedure? If you're looking for a way to help deaden the pain, you might think about taking along a photo of your husband or wife, according to new research.

A study involving 25 women found that those who looked at photos of loved ones while they were subjected to heat on their arms were able to tolerate more pain.

The research was prompted by studies that have found that people are able to tolerate more pain when they have loved ones nearby. Sarah Master and her colleagues at UCLA decided to find out whether just looking at a photo of a loved one would have the same effect.

In the study, published in the journal Psychological Science, they conducted a series of tests in which they exposed volunteers' arms to different levels of heat, including levels that they had previously determined the subjects found unpleasant.

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The subjects were able to tolerate more pain when they were looking at photos of their partners than when they were viewing photos of objects or strangers, the researchers found.

The researchers concluded that "seeing photographs of loved ones may prime associated mental representations of being loved and supported, which may be sufficient to attenuate pain experience. The findings suggest that bringing loved ones' photographs to painful procedures may be beneficial, particularly if those individuals cannot

be there. In fact, because loved ones vary in their ability to provide support, photographs may, in some cases, be more effective than in-person support.

"In sum, these findings challenge the notion that the beneficial effects of social support come solely from supportive social interactions and suggest that simple reminders of loved ones may be sufficient to engender feelings of support."

-- Rob Stein

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Swine flu may spread after fever breaks

People may be able to spread swine flu even after their symptoms have subsided, according to new research reported in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. A study of Air Force cadets who came down with the flu this summer found that a significant proportion of them were still "shedding" virus more than 24 hours after their fever and other symptoms had disappeared.

Public health authorities have been asking people to stay home from work and school for at least a day after their temperatures return to normal. While viable virus does not necessarily mean the illness can be transmitted, the new findings do raise questions about whether the current recommendations are sufficient, the researchers say.

Anne Schuchat of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says she believes the current recommendations are sound. She says other studies indicate that the presence of fever is a good way to know if someone is infectious.

-- Rob Stein

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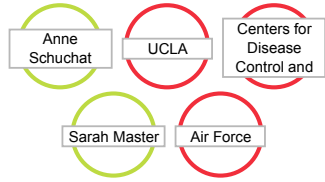
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