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Letters from home may help protect happily married soldiers from PTSD

By Linda Searing, Published: June 13

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Letters from home may help protect
soldiers who are happily married

THE QUESTION After returning from war zones, military personnel often exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Might contact from home during their deployment help prevent PTSD?

THIS STUDY involved 193 male Army soldiers (average age, 29) who had returned in the past year from an overseas tour that averaged 11 months. All had been in combat; most had been stationed in Iraq. All of the soldiers were married, on average about six years. For soldiers who reported being highly satisfied with their marriage, frequent communication with their spouses while deployed was associated with fewer PTSD symptoms, especially when the communication involved letters and e-mails rather than phone calls, instant messages or video chats. However, for soldiers who were not so happily married, frequent communication with their spouses during deployment was linked to higher levels of PTSD. The study's authors suggested that letters and e-mails between happily married spouses were beneficial because they were apt to be carefully crafted and supportive and could be read repeatedly. They added that communication between unhappy spouses probably had more negative content, leading to stress.

WHO MAY BE AFFECTED? Military personnel serving in combat. As many as 20 percent of the U.S. veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan develop PTSD, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

CAVEATS Data on communication between soldiers and their wives came from the soldiers' responses to questionnaires and relied on their recollections. Female soldiers were not tested.

FIND THIS STUDY June issue of the [Journal of Traumatic Stress](#).

LEARN MORE ABOUT PTSD at www.ptsd.va.gov and www.nimh.nih.gov/health.

— Linda Searing

The research described in Quick Study comes from credible, peer-reviewed journals. Nonetheless, conclusive evidence about a treatment is rarely found in a single study. Anyone considering changing or beginning treatment of any kind should consult with a physician.

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