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Healing Touch With Guided Imagery Could Help Relieve PTSD Symptoms In Soldiers, Study Suggests

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Some complementary medicine techniques seem to improve symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in soldiers, according to a small new study.

Researchers at the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine found that healing touch with guided imagery -- two complementary medicine techniques -- helped to decrease symptoms of PTSD and depression and increase quality of life for returning active-duty soldiers, when used in tandem with the usual PTSD treatment.

The soldiers who received both of these treatments experienced greater gains than those who only received the standard PTSD treatment, researchers found.

"Scores for [PTSD symptoms](#) decreased substantially, about 14 points and below the clinical cutoffs for PTSD," study researcher Dr. Mimi Guarneri, one of the founders of the Scripps Center, said in a statement. "This indicates that the intervention was not just statistically significant, but actually decreased symptoms below the threshold for PTSD diagnosis. It made a large difference in reducing PTSD symptoms."

The [Military Medicine study](#) included 55 returning active-duty soldiers who received the normal treatment for PTSD, and 68 who received the normal treatment, as well as healing touch with guided imagery. All of the study participants had at least one symptom of PTSD.

Healing touch is a technique used in complementary medicine where energy is used to help with pain and relaxation, researchers said, while guided imagery is a technique where the patient uses visualization to help decrease pain and ease anxiety.

Diane Wardell, who provides healing touch and is also a nursing professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center, explained to [USA Today](#) [how healing touch works](#):

Healing touch is not a massage. Sometimes the practitioner's hands hover above the body and don't actually make contact. Healing touch is an "energy therapy" that uses gentle hand techniques purported to help re-pattern the patient's energy field and accelerate healing of the body and mind. It is based on the belief that people have fields of energy that are in constant interaction with the environment around them, Wardell says.

The [USA Today](#) article pointed out that even though there isn't a [wealth of research](#) surrounding the effectiveness of healing touch, what studies *have* been conducted show that it could help with [post-surgical wound healing](#), anxiety during breast cancer radiation treatments, and migraine pain.

For more on healing touch and other alternative therapies, click on over to the [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#).

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