

Name _____ Date _____

Swearing 'helps to reduce pain'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/health/8147170.stm>

Adapted from BBC News 13/07/2009© BBC MMIX



Uttering expletives when you hurt yourself is a sensible policy, according to scientists who have shown swearing can help reduce pain.

A study by Keele University researchers found volunteers who cursed at will could *endure* pain nearly 50% longer than civil-tongued peers. They believe swearing helps us downplay being hurt in favour of a more pain-tolerant machismo.

The work by Dr Richard Stephens' team appears in the journal NeuroReport. Dr Stephens, from Keele's school of psychology, came up with the idea for the study after swearing when he *accidentally* hit his thumb with a hammer as he built a garden shed.

He *recruited* 64 volunteers to take part and each individual was asked to submerge their hand in a tub of freezing water for as long as possible while repeating a swear word of their choice. They were then asked to repeat the experiment, this time using a more *commonplace* word that they would use to describe a table.

Despite their *initial* expectations, the researchers found that the volunteers were able to keep their hands plunged in the ice water for a longer period of time when repeating the swear word.

Natural response

On average, the students could tolerate the pain for nearly two minutes when swearing compared with only one minute and 15 seconds when they *refrained* from using expletives.

While it is not clear how or why this *link* exists, the team believes that the pain-lesening effect occurs because swearing triggers our natural 'fight-or-flight' response. They suggest that the accelerated heart rates of the volunteers repeating the swear word may *indicate* an increase in aggression, in a classic fight-or-flight *response* of downplaying a weakness or threat in order to deal with it.

Dr Stephens said the findings might also explain why the centuries-old practice of cursing developed and still *persists* today. But he cautioned: "If they want to use this pain-lesening effect to their advantage they need to do less casual swearing. Swearing is emotional language but if you overuse it, it loses its emotional attachment."

Rohan Byrt of the Casual Swearing Appreciation Society said he thought the study was the first time swearing's benefits had been proved.

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A. Read the article and then answer these questions.

1. What inspired this research?
2. What was the difference between the two experiments?
3. How much longer on average could volunteers tolerate pain when using expletives?
4. What natural human reaction may be the reason for these results?
5. How should you improve the pain lessening effect?

B. There are ten words highlighted in *bold italic*

endure *accidentally* *recruited* *commonplace* *initial*
refrained *link* *indicate* *response* *persists*

Which of the following words could be used in place of these words in the text? You can only use ten of the twenty words below.

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| unintentionally | report | chain | show | relative |
| original | reaction | enlisted | purposely | question |
| relationship | continues | tolerate | ordinary | sustained |
| disregard | last | changed | dismissed | ceased |

C. What are your views? Do you think this is true? Should people swear at all? Does it show a lack of vocabulary if you swear a lot? Use the space below to write a short essay detailing your views.

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A.

1. When Dr Stephens hit his thumb with a hammer
2. In the first part the volunteers could swear and not in the second part.?
3. 45 seconds
4. Fight-or-fright response.
5. Use less casual swearing.

B.

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| <i>endure</i> | <i>tolerate</i> |
| <i>accidentally</i> | <i>unintentionally</i> |
| <i>recruited</i> | <i>enlisted</i> |
| <i>commonplace</i> | <i>ordinary</i> |
| <i>initial</i> | <i>original</i> |
| <i>refrained</i> | <i>ceased</i> |
| <i>link</i> | <i>relationship</i> |
| <i>indicate</i> | <i>show</i> |
| <i>response</i> | <i>reaction</i> |
| <i>persists</i> | <i>continues</i> |