

Texting doesn't replace the feel-good effects of talking, study says

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Girls who actually spoke to their mothers experienced positive physical responses.

(HealthDay)—It's hard to quibble with the speed and convenience of connecting through texts and instant messages, but scientists say that today's ubiquitous online social communication may not confer the same feel-good effects as plain old talking.

Studying a group of girls, U.S. researchers found that key emotion-linked hormones—including cortisol and [oxytocin](#)—responded in potentially beneficial ways when the girls talked over a [stressful event](#) with their mothers compared to when they texted about it.

"We're not really sure why, but maybe hearing that voice is special. Hearing someone's voice is not only able to convey tone and sincerity, but also identity," said study author Leslie Seltzer, a [postdoctoral fellow](#) in the department of psychology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

"A child can identify that person is definitely their parent, whereas with texting they can't. It's perhaps not particularly surprising but applicable, because everyone likes using texting or instant messaging so much . . . but people should know that it's not

necessarily eliciting the same [\[emotional response\]](#)."

The study, recently presented at a meeting of the Society of Personality and [Social Psychology](#) in New Orleans, was published in the journal [Evolution and Human Behavior](#).

Seltzer and her colleagues compared the hormonal responses of 68 girls between the ages of nearly 8 and 12 when hearing their mother's voice with those who communicated with their mothers via instant message after completing a stressful math and verbal test.

Compared to girls who texted their mothers after the [stressor](#), those who either spoke to their mothers by phone or in person had lower levels of cortisol—the "stress" hormone—and higher levels of oxytocin, known as the "love hormone" because of its link to forming positive relationships. The [hormone levels](#) of the instant-messaging group were similar to those of a control group of girls who weren't allowed any contact with their mothers after the test.

One expert praised the study.

"I think we need to see a lot more research like this," said Bert Uchino, a professor of social psychology and health psychology at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. "The fact that they kept track of cortisol and oxytocin and the finding on both measures was stress-related makes me more confident about the findings . . . They did a true experiment that can rule out a lot of alternative explanations."

Uchino pointed out, however, that while emotion-related hormones rose and fell in ways that indicated a stress response when the girls texted, participants didn't actually report feeling stressed when doing so compared to when they spoke to their mothers.

"People really don't know what's going on in their bodies," he said. "People may think this [type of communicating] is very similar, because they're not reporting any more stress. There's very little work going on like this, that's trying to compare if different modes of communication are equally effective."

A recent PEW survey confirmed that texting is becoming the primary means of communication among teens. The 2012 study found that 63 percent of teens exchange text messages every day, while 39 percent call people by cellphone on a daily basis. Twenty-two percent said they use instant-messaging daily.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics shares tips for parents on [talking to kids about social media](#).

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