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## **TACTILE CONTACT AS A WAY TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH**

The focus of our current research is tactile contact and the way it supports people's mental health. Reduced or completely limited tactile contact is inevitably accompanied by feelings of harm to current close emotional ties and anxiety. In today's world, the flow of information has greatly increased and people have become more isolated than ever before. In 2018, the Contact Research Institute began observing passengers in airports to determine how often they touch each other. It turned out that 98% of the time people were busy with their phones and there was no body contact between them.

Evolutionarily human is a social creature: being around other people increased our chances of survival. Therefore, our brain perceives touch as a sign that we are not alone, which means we are safe. During such contact, signals are sent from sensors under the skin to the vagus nerve. It connects the brain to all the other organs. Increasing the tone of the vagus nerve slows down the nervous system and activates several useful reactions in the body. A person becomes less tense, and a smile may appear on his face.

What are the benefits of tactile contacts? Sufficient levels of tactile emotional connection increase overall health, feelings of happiness, social support, relationship satisfaction, and the formation of relationships based on stable forms of attachment.

Touching helps the body produce antidepressant hormones: Oxytocin promotes feelings of trust and affection, and can also slow down aging. Scientist recommend hugging for at least 20 seconds a day, after which oxytocin production begins. Another important result of touching is the reduction of cortisol, the stress hormone.

Through touching, heart rate and blood pressure decrease. Together with the change in hormone levels in the body, this gives a sense of peace and tranquility. Body contact helps raise the white blood cell count even in patients with cancer or HIV infection, and also helps to tolerate chemotherapy sessions more easily.

People experiencing tactile hunger have an increased level of anxiety, an increased tendency to depression, feeling of loneliness, stress, may begin to lose the ability to identify and show their emotions, forming an affective, anxiety and personality disorders. People in this condition tend to abuse psychoactive substances, as well as to think about suicide.

The most "high quality" bodily contact occurs when there is a positive emotional connection between people. However, experts from London have found that even a brief gentle touch reduces the feeling of loneliness, even if it comes from a stranger. It was with this goal in 2004 that Australian Juan Mann went out on the street with a sign "Free Hugs".

To sum up, the meaning of touch goes far beyond the purely bodily, physical, but carries with it a deep emotional charge. The language of touch is our first language, over which all other development builds.

### ***References:***

1. BBC News (2021) available at: <https://www.bbc.com/vert-fut-53339755> (accessed 20 October 2021)
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