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Breaking Up Hurts: Ending Relationships Is Like Physical Pain

Study Finds the Brain Processes the Social Pain of a Breakup the Same Way as Physical Pain

BY KIM CAROLLO, ABC NEWS MEDICAL UNIT March 28, 2011



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As anyone who's experienced a broken heart, and as countless songs, stories and movies confirm, love can hurt. That pain, according to a new study, is physical as well as emotional.

> Researchers led by Ethan Kross, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, found that the experience of social rejection, such as a romantic breakup, activates the same parts of the brain involved in sensing physical pain.

"These results give new meaning to the idea that rejection 'hurts,'" the authors wrote.

Experts believe this study can offer new insight into the complexities of social rejection, and how the experience can be emotionally and physically debilitating.

"The psychic pain that follows from the breakup of a relationship definitely affects physical health," said Susan Heitler, a Denver clinical psychologist. "Research has shown, for instance, that grieving

Heitler also said rejection can lead to depression and avoidance of other

increases the risk of heart attacks."

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Bonnie Levin, an associate professor of neurology at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, said the study highlights a biological link between social pain and physical pain, something that has been long suspected.



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