

Distraction and coping with pain.

By McCaul, Kevin D.; Malott, James M.

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Abstract

Offers explicit conceptual explanations of why and when distraction will be effective in coping with pain-produced distress and reviews research related to this conceptual scheme. A theoretical case for the effectiveness of distraction is drawn from assumptions about the importance of cognition in mediating the pain experience and the limited capacity available for focusing attention on different stimulus events. Combining these assumptions led to 4 principles that were examined with available data. Principle 1 holds that distractions will reduce stress as compared with uninstructed and placebo control conditions. Principle 2 maintains that distraction techniques that require more attentional capacity will be more effective. Principle 3 contends that distraction will have stronger effects on pain stimuli of low intensity. Principle 4 predicts that distraction will be more effective than sensation redefinition for mild pain stimuli, but the reverse will be true for intense pain stimuli. Data support these principles. Research is needed to compare distraction and expectancy control conditions, to test distraction for clinical as opposed to acute pain, to compare distraction strategies that vary in quantified attentional requirements, and to discover the features of pain stimuli. (89 ref) (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2010 APA, all rights reserved)