

# Making art can help reduce stress

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This research was conducted by **Girija Kaimal, Kendra Ray** and **Juan Muniz** at **Drexel University, USA**

## Summary

A small number of studies have indicated that making art reduces stress. This is the first study to investigate the effects of visual self-expression on stress levels in healthy adults, in a format similar to an art therapy session and by examining participants' written responses to the experience.

## Salivary cortisol levels were measured to indicate stress response

39 participants from a large university were invited to an art-making session facilitated by an art therapist and encouraged to choose from three types of media to create their own work. Prior to the session, participants were asked about their previous levels of art-making experience and provided a saliva sample. Following the session, a second saliva sample was collected and participants were asked to share a written description of their experience with the art making.

## Average cortisol levels were significantly lower after art making

Despite considerable variation, results indicated a reduction in cortisol for about 75 per cent of the sample. These results persisted regardless of demographic differences, prior experience with art making and choice of media. However, lowering of cortisol levels was more likely to be observed earlier in the day as cortisol levels are naturally highest in the morning and decline throughout the day. Participants who reported experiencing an evolving process and those reporting learning about one's self were more likely to experience lowering of cortisol levels.

The authors suggest future research would benefit from a larger sample size, control- and clinical-group comparisons, psychological measures of stress and a more accurate cortisol biomarker. Better understanding of participants' experience of the art-making process and why cortisol levels remained same or increased in some participants should also be explored.

This summary is by **Anna Kolliakou, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

## Keywords

**experiment** **art therapy** **USA** **art** **stress**

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