

Smell of fear helps in cognition

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The chemical warning signals produced by fear improve cognitive performance, a study at Rice University in Houston indicates.

Women who were exposed to chemicals from fear-induced sweat performed more accurately on word-association tasks than did women exposed to chemicals from other types of sweat or no sweat at all.

"It is well-documented in the research literature that animals experiencing stress and fear produce chemical warning signals that can lead to behavioral, endocrinological and immunological changes in their fellow animals of the same species, but we wanted to see if this applies to humans as well," said principal investigator Denise Chen, assistant professor of psychology at Rice.

Chen collected samples of sweat from research volunteers who kept gauze pads in their armpits while they watched videos of horror movies and non-threatening documentaries.

The study was published in the journal *Chemical Senses*.

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