

# Can hugs make you healthier?

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## *Salon:*

It's February. Are you sick? If you are, don't fret. The Centers for Disease Control tells us that cold and flu season peaks in January and February, so statistically speaking, your sniffles are nothing special. And, believe me, I feel for you. I have a 4-year-old daughter who is the most thoroughgoing germ collector known to humankind. Every day she trots home from her language immersion preschool, an international clearinghouse for viruses. I've lost count of how many times she has walked in coughing and sniffing, a little pouty and with her arms outstretched, looking for a consolatory hug. Of course I toss caution aside like a gum wrapper because that little hug feels like the greatest damn thing ever. The irony here is that despite all that, and even though it's February, I'm not sick. How does that work? Some new research from Carnegie Mellon University might give us some clues.

In 1991, CMU psychology professor Sheldon Cohen published a landmark study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showing how stress can compromise our immune system and leave us more vulnerable to the common cold. Committed to finding practical ways of reducing both stress and illness, Cohen's later studies focused on the stress-relieving powers of what he calls "social support": a catch-all phrase for the caring, empathy and reassurance you receive from those around you — from the people who, whether they admit it or not, think you are mostly awesome. Social support comes in many forms: the long phone chats with your BFF, hanging with your bros, your church group, your reading club, and the first 60 minutes of a family get-together, before anyone mentions an upcoming election.

Read the whole story: [Salon](#)