Hypersensitivity of the amygdala—a brain region critical in fear processing—due to combat stress, normalizes in soldiers within a year and a half of returning from deployment. These findings, reported online this week in *Molecular Psychiatry*, shed light on the long-lasting effects of prolonged stress on the brain.

Previous studies show that combat stress leads to increased activity and changes in connectivity in the amygdala. However, it was unclear how long after returning from combat, these changes endure.
In a long-term study Guido van Wingen and colleagues assessed amygdala function of 23 combat soldiers who had been deployed for four months in Afghanistan compared to a control group of non-deployed soldiers. Both before deployment, shortly after deployment, and a year and half after, soldiers performed a face matching task that included angry and fearful faces, while in a functional MRI scan. While amygdala reactivity was increased shortly after deployment, the MRI scans showed no significant differences in amygdala reactivity between the soldiers deployed and those not deployed a year and a half after returning from deployment, leading them to conclude that amygdala sensitivity is highly plastic and adaptive to the environment. While the reactivity of the region may increase in stressful environments, after some time in a safe setting, it normalizes.

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