

# When in pain, say 'ow' to bear it

By **FENG ZENGKUN**

WHEN you are in pain, don't suffer in silence.

Researchers in Singapore have shown that saying the word "ow" actually helps people to tolerate pain longer.

Their study looked only at the effects of saying the word "ow", but the results suggest that making any other sound could also help people cope with pain.

The researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS) asked 56 people to put one hand in water chilled to 4 deg C, and then timed how long they could stand the pain under different scenarios before removing their hands.

Five scenarios were tested: when the participants were silent; when they followed prompts

to say "ow" or press a button; when they heard a pre-recorded audio clip of themselves saying "ow"; and when they heard a clip of someone else saying "ow".

They were asked to rate how painful each experience was afterwards.

The multiple scenarios were to see what helped the participants to tolerate pain, and how it did so. The order of the tests was shuffled among them to control the effect of their hands adjusting to the icy water.

The researchers said that, on average, the participants were able to keep their hands in the icy water for five more seconds when they said "ow" and four more seconds when they pressed the button, compared to the other scenarios.

As the effects of pressing a but-

ton and saying "ow" were matched and positively correlated, they likely had a common underlying mechanism, said Ms Genevieve Swee, 23, who conducted the study as part of her honours thesis at the department of psychology.

"Although we could point to the role of motor acts, the actual mechanisms require further specification," the researchers said.

They added that more research is needed to find out whether the benefit of saying "ow" extends to people who suffer chronic pain, for example due to nerve injuries.

If it does, "the act of talking or singing may be beneficial to them", the researchers said.

The findings were published recently in the American Pain Society's *Journal Of Pain*.

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