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VITAL SIGNS

## Thresholds: With Pain, Older Is Better

By ERIC NAGOURNEY

**Y**ounger people may be assumed to be more resilient physically than older people, but when it comes to chronic pain, researchers have found the opposite appears to be the case.

A study that looked at the experiences of more than 5,800 patients seeking treatment at a pain center over an eight-year period found that those over 50 tended to bear up better. The study, which appears in the journal *Pain Medicine*, was written by Dr. Tamara A. Baker of the University of South Florida and Dr. Carmen Renée Green of the University of Michigan.

To gauge the effects of a variety of painful conditions on the lives of the patients, the researchers asked them a series of questions. The patients were asked to describe the intensity of their pain and just how disabled they felt.

The study also looked at the psychological effects, asking patients how well they slept, for example, and assessing them for symptoms of depression. The researchers also asked about alcohol use.

Like earlier studies, the report found that the black patients had a harder time coping with pain than the white ones. But within both groups, the older patients did better than the younger ones.

There could be several explanations, Dr. Green said.

In part, it may be that younger people, juggling demands like children and jobs, already have more stress than their elders. But it could also be attitudinal.

"The expectations may be different," Dr. Green said. "I often hear when I talk to patients: 'Oh, it's just my arthritis. Oh, it's just aches.' "