A recent study found that a text message-based suicide prevention intervention may be a simple, low-cost way to reduce suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among military personnel.

Active-duty military personnel who were seen in behavioral health or medical services for suicidal ideation or a suicide attempt completed a baseline assessment. They were then randomly selected to receive either treatment as usual or a Caring Contacts intervention. Treatment as usual involved standard care services determined by a clinician, such as individual therapy and psychiatric medication. The Caring Contacts intervention involved standard care services, but also included 11 text messages sent over the course of one year. The text messages were simple check-in messages (e.g., “hope you’re having a good day today”) from the clinician who conducted the baseline assessment. All participants were assessed 12 months later for suicidal ideation, suicide risk incidents (i.e., medical evacuation or inpatient psychiatric admission), emergency department visits to prevent suicide, and suicide attempts.

During the follow-up period, Caring Contacts did not significantly impact the presence or severity of current suicidal ideation or decrease the odds of a suicide risk incident. However, Caring Contacts did lead to modest decreases in the odds of reporting any suicidal ideation in the follow-up period and reporting one or more suicide attempts since baseline. Caring Contacts may be a promising intervention to reduce suicide risk among active duty military personnel. More research is needed to determine how or whether it might work in civilian populations.