Can humans hibernate like squirrels while traveling in deep space?

Books and movies have long conveyed the image of people slumbering in transparent pods as they hurtle through space. That future is far away, but a Houston research institute is providing $4 million in grants to bring that vision a little closer.

Four teams of researchers will investigate clues to hibernation. One group will look to squirrels; another to prehistoric humans for clues about hibernation. A third team will put volunteers into 20-hour-per-day cold sleeps, and the final group will submerge liver tissues to test the notion of submerging astronauts in a below-freezing liquid to halt all bodily functions.

In suspended animation, the human body could be cooled down to reduce its metabolism and conserve energy. The person’s heart rate would slow, they wouldn’t breathe as much and they wouldn’t eat as much.

All of this would be useful when traveling hundreds of millions of miles to Mars, or farther, in a spacecraft. Astronauts wouldn’t need to pack as much food. They would create less carbon dioxide to scrub from the air. And, for their mental sanity, they’d have less time to go stir crazy in cramped quarters.

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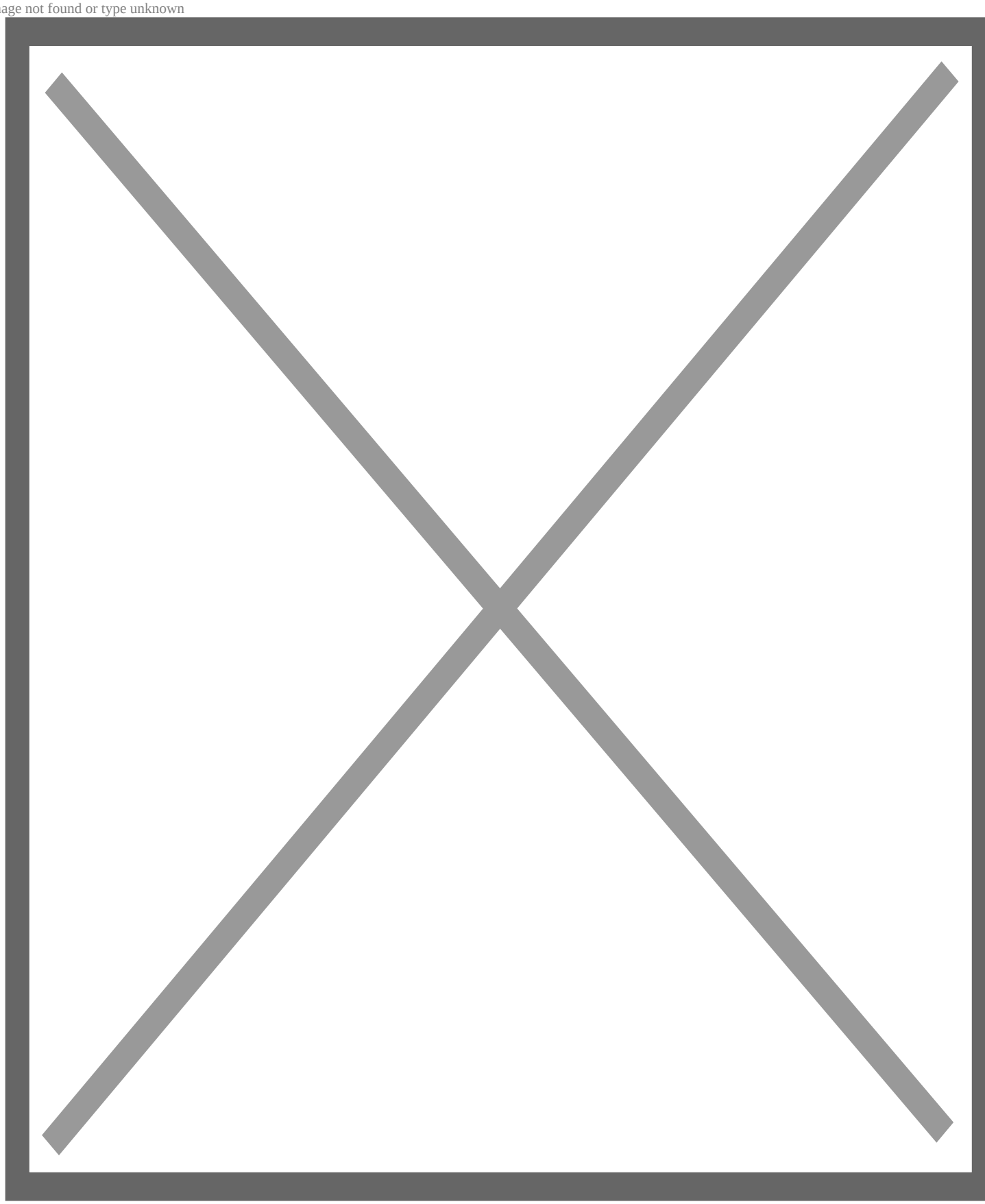

Credit: Ken Ellis

This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.