

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Chronic Disease 15

Effect of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Persons With Chronic Back Pain

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Background: Numerous therapies exist for treating chronic low back pain (CLBP) but few, if any, have been found to be cost-effective. There remains a need to identify treatments whose benefits outweigh their costs. This pilot study evaluated the effect on CLBP of an inexpensive and potentially life-changing training program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

Methods: Members of a large health plan with uncomplicated low back pain persisting over three months were invited to participate in a trial comparing MBSR (8 weekly 2.5 hour sessions) with a book on self-management techniques. Forty-six volunteers were randomized to MBSR (n=22) or the book (n=24). Outcomes measured before randomization and after 12 and 26 weeks included function (Roland) symptom bothersomeness (0 to 10 scale) and general health status (SF-36). MBSR training participants were also asked about its effect on their thoughts, feelings, reactions or activities.

Results: Eighty-two percent of participants randomized to MBSR attended at least one class (median 7 classes). Adjusting for baseline values, the MBSR group fared better than the book group by 1.9 points on the Roland scale at 12 weeks ($P>0.05$), but by only 0.3 points at 26 weeks ($P>0.05$). Differences in SF-36 and symptom bothersomeness were small. However, at 26 weeks, all 16 respondents in the MBSR group claimed to still be practicing MBSR for an average of 4 days per week and 20 minutes per day and to have experienced lasting benefits, most commonly decreased stress, increased ability to relax, increased mindfulness, and ability to cope.

Conclusions: Although this pilot study found only limited and temporary benefits of MBSR on conventional CLBP outcomes (function, symptoms), informal qualitative feedback suggests MBSR may have other important benefits (e.g, coping, attitude) for persons with CLBP and possibly for other conditions caused or exacerbated by life stress.