CAM in Review

When reading reports on new research, it is important to remember that no single study should be seen as providing the whole truth. The following reports offer helpful clues but in most cases further research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Acupuncture as Effective as Medication in Easing Pain of Herpes Zoster (Shingles)


Abstract: Background: Data on the potential efficacy of acupuncture (AC) in controlling intense or very intense pain in patients with Herpes Zoster (HZ) has not been so far adequately assessed in comparison with standard pharmacological treatment (ST) by a controlled trial design. Methods: Within the VZV Pescara study, pain was assessed in HZ patients on a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) and by the McGill Pain Questionnaire (MPQ) both at the beginning and at the end of treatment. Response rates, mean changes in pain intensity, differences in total pain burden with an area-under-the-curve (AUC) method over a 1-year follow-up and differences in the incidence of Post-Herpetic Neuralgia (PHN) were evaluated. Results: One hundred and two patients were randomized to receive either AC (n=52) or ST (n=50) for 4 weeks. The ST group received 75 mg pregabalin along with local anesthetic injections. Groups were comparable regarding age, sex, pain intensity at presentation and missed antiviral prescription. Both interventions were largely effective. No significant differences were observed in response rates (81.6% vs 89.2%, p=0.8), mean reduction of VAS (4.1+/-2.3 vs 4.9+/-1.9, p=0.12) and MPQ scores (1.3+/-0.9 vs 1.3+/-0.9, p=0.9), incidence of PHN after 3 months (48.4% vs 46.8%, p=0.5), and mean AUC during follow-up (199+/-136 vs 173+/-141, p=0.4). No serious treatment-related adverse event was observed in both groups. Conclusions: This controlled and randomized trial provides the first evidence of a potential role of AC for the treatment of acute herpetic pain.

Meditation Frequency May Be More Important Than Type of Meditation


Objectives: This study examined whether practitioners of two meditation types differ on self-reported mindfulness skills and psychologic well-being. Design: This was a cross-sectional study comparing two convenience meditation groups drawn from local meditation centers, one group practicing mindfulness meditation (MM), and the other practicing transcendental meditation (TM). Settings/location: The study was conducted at several meditation centers in southern Netherlands. Subjects: Thirty-five (35) participants practiced MM (69% women) and 20 practiced TM (42% women). Outcome measures: Participants completed questionnaires on mindfulness skills (Mindful Attention Awareness Scale and two subscales from Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills), psychologic well-being (perceived stress, global mood, and quality of life), and meditation duration and frequency. Results: All self-reported mindfulness facets correlated with almost all measures of well-being across groups, but no differences were evident between meditation types regarding mindfulness or well-being. Days per week spent on meditation was the only multivariable predictor of both higher mindfulness and lower perceived stress. Conclusions: The results suggest that self-reported mindfulness and psychologic well-being may be associated with meditation frequency rather than any potential differences when comparing MM and TM in this study. Note that substantial differences between MM and TM groups were present on basic demographics, which were controlled statistically.
Yoga Eases Abdominal Pain in Children with Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Pilot Study


Objectives: The aim of this pilot study was to evaluate the effect of yoga exercises on pain frequency and intensity and on quality of life in children with functional abdominal pain. Design: 20 children, aged 8-18 years, with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or functional abdominal pain (FAP) were enrolled and received 10 yoga lessons. Pain intensity and pain frequency were scored in a pain diary and quality of life was measured with the Kidscreen quality of life questionnaire (KQoL). Results In the 8-11 year old group and the 11-18 year old group pain frequency was significantly decreased at the end of therapy (p = 0.031 and p = 0.004) compared to baseline. In the 8-11 year group pain intensity was also significantly decreased at this time point (p = 0.015). After 3 months there still was a significant decrease in pain frequency in the younger patient group (p = 0.04) and a borderline significant decrease in pain frequency in the total group (p = 0.052). Parents reported a significantly higher KQoL-score after yoga treatment. Conclusion: This pilot study suggests that yoga exercises are effective for children aged 8-18 years with FAP, resulting in significant reduction of pain intensity and frequency, especially in children of 8-11 years old.

Light Therapy Appears Helpful for Depression in War Zone


Objective: The authors investigated the potential effectiveness of light therapy as an augmentation treatment for depression among active duty service members. Design: This pilot study recruited active duty service members deployed to an area of combat operations. Enrollment was offered to service members scoring 50 or greater on the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale. The authors implemented a systematic sampling technique randomly assigning the first subject and then alternating each subsequent subject to either a reference group which received the usual standard of care plus light therapy at 10,000 lux or a control group which received the usual standard of care and light therapy at 50 lux. Both groups received 90 min light sessions for five days. Setting: The study was conducted at Walter Reed Army Medical Center’s Psychiatry Continuity Service. Main Outcome Measure: Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale collected at baseline, after five consecutive daily light sessions, and one week later. Results: A repeated measures analysis of variance (RM ANOVA) was conducted to examine the change in Zung Depression results which showed a significant main effect for time F(2, 21) = 5.05, p < 0.02, indicating that depression scores reduced over time for both participant groups. Post hoc comparisons (with Bonferroni correction) demonstrated that the post-treatment Zung score was significantly lower indicating less depression than the baseline Zung score (p < 0.004) and there was a statistical trend (p < 0.05) for depression scores to be reduced halfway through the study in the treatment group. Conclusion: The post hoc analysis hints at the possibility of a reduction in depression during the active phase of light treatment.
Yoga Eases Schizophrenia Symptoms in Small Study


Objectives: There has been limited study of therapeutic yoga as a complementary treatment for schizophrenia. This study investigates the effects of a Yoga Therapy program on symptomatology and quality of life in adults with schizophrenia in a state psychiatric facility. Methods: In a randomized, controlled pilot study, 18 clinically stable patients (12 men and 6 women) with schizophrenia (mean age=42±13.5) were randomized to an 8-week Yoga Therapy program (YT) and a Waitlist group (WL). YT intervention included yoga postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation. At baseline and at 8 weeks, symptomatology was measured using the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS). Secondary efficacy outcomes were measured with the World Health Organization Quality of Life BREF questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF). Results: The YT group obtained significant improvements in positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia symptoms compared to WL, including PANSS scores on positive syndrome (t=2.64, p=0.02), negative syndrome (t=3.04, p<0.01), general psychopathology (t=3.74, p<0.00), activation (t=2.29, p<0.04), paranoia (t=2.89, p<0.01), and depression subscales (t=2.62, p<0.02). PANSS total scores also decreased for the YT group (t=4.54, p<0.00). YT had improved perceived quality of life in physical (t=2.38, p<0.04) and psychologic domains (t=2.88, p<0.01). Conclusions: Adults with schizophrenia being treated in a state psychiatric facility who participated in an 8-week therapeutic yoga program showed significant improvements in psychopathology and quality of life compared with controls. The findings of this study need to be confirmed in larger, more sufficiently powered studies with active control groups.