

Yoga for Anxiety

Led by researchers at NYU Grossman School of Medicine, a new study found that yoga is more effective for generalized anxiety disorder than standard education on stress management, but not effective as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for better responses to challenges.

“Generalized anxiety disorder is a very common condition, yet many are not willing or able to access evidence-based treatments,” says lead study author Naomi M. Simon, MD, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at NYU Langone Health. “Our findings demonstrate that yoga, which is safe and widely available, can improve symptoms for some people with this disorder

and could be a valuable tool in an overall treatment plan.” The study has been published in *JAMA Psychiatry*.

In the study, 226 men and women with a generalized anxiety disorder were randomly assigned to three groups - CBT, Kundalini yoga, or stress-management education. After three months, both CBT and yoga were found to be significantly more effective for anxiety than stress management. Specifically, 54 percent of those who practiced yoga met response criteria for meaningfully improved symptoms compared to 33 percent in the stress-education group. Of those treated with CBT, 71 percent met these symptom improvement criteria.



“This study suggests that at short-term there is significant value for people with a generalized anxiety disorder to give yoga a try to see if it works for them. Yoga is well-tolerated, easily accessible, and has several health benefits,” says Dr. Simon.

Ways to Overcome Loneliness in the Time of Social Distancing

A team at Cambridge’s School of Medicine carried out a systematic review looking at the existing evidence on different approaches to tackling loneliness and social isolation. Their results were published in *PLOS ONE*.

There is strong evidence that both social isolation and loneliness are linked to cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety. A team led by Dr. Christopher Williams, at the time University of Cambridge medical student, identified 58 relevant studies of interventions to reduce social isolation, social support, and loneliness that could potentially be adapted for people living in pandemic-related isolation.



Among some of the approaches identified in the studies are:

- Robot dogs and robot seals (but not real budgies): Two studies indicated that robotic dogs could prove as effective as real dogs in reducing loneliness. They might also be more feasible for some groups living in pandemic conditions than real dogs. Similarly, weekly sessions with Paro, an interactive robotic seal that responds to contact and other stimuli by moving or imitating the noises of a baby harp seal, significantly improved loneliness scores. The robotic animals gave better results than an ‘avian companionship’ scheme involving interacting with a live budgie, which did not report significant results.
- Mindfulness and Tai Chi: Mindfulness-based therapies and Tai Chi Qigong meditation led to significant improvements in loneliness or social support outcomes.
- Laughter therapy: Laughter exercises, deep breathing exercises, playing games, singing songs loudly and laughter meditation also helped reduce loneliness. Together with mindfulness and Tai Chi

Qigong meditation, these represent potentially low-cost interventions that can be conducted in on-line groups on a large scale.

- Reminiscence therapy: Structured weekly sessions concentrated on a different topic each week, including sharing memories, increasing participant awareness/expression of their feelings, identifying past positive relationships, recalling family history and life stories, and identifying positive strengths and goals.
- Indoor gardening: One study of an indoor gardening program in a nursing home, where in participants were given their plants and taught how to
- Video conferencing: Two studies looking at video calls found that weekly catch-ups with family members could help reduce feelings of loneliness.

“Many of these activities, such as mindfulness, meditation, and talking therapies, could be delivered at a large scale in online groups, potentially at low cost,” said Dr. Adam Townson from the School of Clinical Medicine at Cambridge. “Any approach to help people suffering from loneliness or social isolation must take digital exclusion into consideration.”

Self-Administered Acupressure could help for Lower Back Pain

“Acupressure is similar to acupuncture, but instead of needles, the pressure is applied with a finger, thumb or device to specific points on the body,” says Susan Murphy, ScD, OTR, an associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Michigan Medicine and lead author of the study.

In the study, published in *Pain Medicine*, the research team randomly assigned 67 participants with chronic low back pain into three groups: relaxing acupressure, stimulating acupressure, or

usual care. “Relaxing acupressure is thought to be effective in reducing insomnia while stimulating acupressure is thought to be effective in fatigue reduction,” Murphy says. Participants in the acupressure groups were trained to administer acupressure on certain points of the body, and spent between 27 and 30 minutes daily, over six weeks, performing the technique.

Participants in the usual care group were asked to continue whatever treatments they were currently receiving from their care providers

to manage their back pain and fatigue. “Compared to the usual care group, we found that people who performed stimulating acupressure experienced pain and fatigue improvement and those that performed relaxing acupressure felt their pain had improved after six weeks,” Murphy says. “Although larger studies are needed, acupressure may be a useful pain management strategy given that it is low risk, low cost, and easy to administer,” Murphy says.

Study Finds Tai Chi Improves Brain Metabolism and Muscle Energetics

Using magnetic resonance spectroscopy, a non-invasive method of measuring brain and muscle chemistry using MRI machines, tests conducted in 6 older adults enrolled in a 12-week Tai Chi program revealed significant increases in a marker of neuronal health in the brain and significantly improved recovery rates of a metabolite involved in energy production in leg muscles.

“The benefits of Tai Chi have been well known; however recent research such as our study can quantify these improvements using objective measures,” said senior author Dr. Alexander Lin, of Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School.



Relieving Menstrual Pain with Acupressure

The researchers from Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin wanted to evaluate whether, in a group of women suffering from severe menstrual pain, aged between 18 and 34, self-acupressure would be more effective at achieving a



sustained reduction in menstrual pain than usual care alone (e.g. pain medication and hormonal contraceptives). The results of this study have been published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

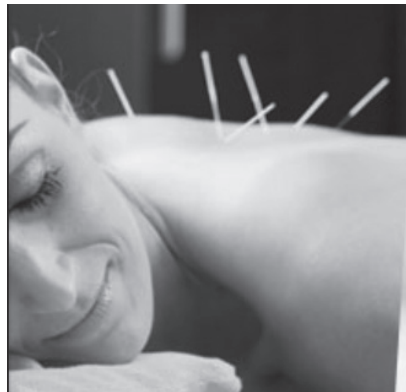
A total of 221 participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups, both of which received a study app and short introduction. Acupressure-based features with instructions on how to administer self-acupressure shortly before and during menstruation were only made available to the intervention group. One advantage of an app-based intervention is its ability to provide visual descriptions of the pressure points users need to target to achieve the desired

effect. It could also send regular reminders. The app helped participants to apply simple self-acupressure techniques to three different acupressure points. After three months, 37 percent of participants in the acupressure group reported a 50 percent reduction in pain intensity. After six months, this proportion had increased to more than half of the women in this group (58 percent). Only 25 percent of women in the control group reported a similar reduction in pain intensity at both the 3-month and 6-month marks. Women in the acupressure group also used less pain medication than women in the control group and reported lower levels of pain overall.

Electroacupuncture Regulates Blood Sugar Levels in Overweight and Obese Women

For women who are overweight or obese and are unable to exercise, new research appearing in *The FASEB Journal* suggests combining acupuncture with an electrical current can be of help. In the report, an international team of researchers used electroacupuncture to assist with muscle contraction, which led to improved blood sugar regulation.

The scientists used a cohort of overweight and obese women with and without PCOS. Changes in blood sugar levels were measured during and after 45 minutes of acu-



puncture. Blood glucose regulation was improved in both women with and without PCOS after 45 minutes of treatment. Researchers also

used a group of rats to investigate the mechanism leading to blood glucose uptake. They found that electroacupuncture causing muscle contractions activates the autonomic nervous system in rats and that the blood glucose-regulating effect was reversed by administering drugs that block the autonomic receptors. This study has important clinical implications for patients with prediabetes and a reduced ability to regulate blood sugar levels.

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