Body Awareness and the Practice of Yoga or Meditation in 443 Primary Care Patients with Past or Current Low Back Pain

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BACKGROUND

Low back pain (LBP) is the most common reason for patients to seek integrative medicine care. Neurologically, perceived pain is an element of interoceptive body awareness. Body awareness (BA) describes how we attend to our body and to pain. Yoga and meditation may help pain patients through improved BA, but BA has rarely been assessed in this population.

OBJECTIVE

- to provide the first quantitative data on Body Awareness in primary care patients with past or current LBP,
- to compare those who practiced yoga and/or meditation with those who did not.

METHODS

Design: 2-year observational cohort study; secondary data analysis.
Setting: large health care system: Kaiser Permanente, Northern California.
Subjects: 435 primary care patients, who had acute LBP at inception.
Measures: the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA) questionnaire assesses 8 dimensions of BA: noticing, distracting, worrying, attention regulation, emotional awareness, self-regulation, body-listening, and trusting.
Analysis: At follow-up, we compared rates of non-recovery (chronic pain) and MAIA scores between those who practiced a form of mind-body therapy and those who did not.

RESULTS

- Persistent/recurrent LBP: 82 (18.5%)
- Experience with yoga: 80 (18.5%)
- Experience with meditation: 144 (33.3%)
- Experience with yoga and meditation: 52 (12.0%)
- Experience with any kind of mind-body approach: 184 (41.5%)

Higher levels of yoga and meditation experience [4 levels] were associated with higher Body Awareness scores (MAIA).

CONCLUSIONS

- Patients with body awareness and by 35% (p=0.047) reporting any type of mind-body therapy experience.
- The risk of having chronic pain 2 years after a first episode of acute low back pain was reduced by 38% (p=0.041) in those who reported more than “a taste of” meditation experience by 35% (p=0.047) reporting any type of mind-body therapy experience.

Table 2: Self-Reported Interoceptive Awareness in a Cohort of Acute Low Back Pain Patients at 2-Year Follow-Up

Table 3: Proportion of Chronic Pain at 2 Years

Table 1: Patient Characteristics (N = 605)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean (SD)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>50.5 (12.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male 327 Female 278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>American-Indian 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Some High School 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Full time 387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of LBP at baseline interview, mean days (±SD) (median)</td>
<td>230 (±80) 174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.001; ***p<0.0001.

p-values: patients reporting more than a taste of experience of yoga, meditation or both compared to those reporting just a taste of experience or less.