

A Training Program on Pain Coping Skills for African Americans with Hip or Knee Arthritis

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What was the research about?

Arthritis is a long-term health problem that causes joint swelling, pain, and reduced motion. Compared with white Americans, African Americans are more likely to have arthritis and to report higher levels of arthritis pain.

In this study, the research team wanted to learn if a pain coping skills training program tailored for African Americans with hip or knee arthritis reduced pain severity. The team worked with African-American patients, doctors, and public health workers to make the program culturally appropriate for African Americans with arthritis. The team also looked at the program's effect on how patients thought about and lived with pain. The team compared patients who took part in the program and also received their usual care with those who received their usual care only.

What were the results?

After three or nine months, patients who were in the training program didn't differ in pain severity reduction compared with those who weren't in the program.

But compared with those who weren't in the program, patients in the program

- Had higher confidence in their ability to manage arthritis
- Had fewer negative thoughts when in pain

- Used pain coping strategies more often
- Reported more improvement in arthritis symptoms

The groups didn't differ in

- Ability to do daily activities
- Symptoms of depression
- Overall mental and physical health

Who was in the study?

The study included 248 African Americans with hip or knee arthritis. Patients received care at one of two health systems in North Carolina. The average age was 59, and 51 percent were men.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to receive the program or not. During the study, all patients continued their usual arthritis care. The program offered 11 weekly training sessions. A counselor led these sessions on the phone for 30–45 minutes. During sessions, the counselor

- Taught pain coping skills, such as relaxation and managing negative thoughts
- Helped patients practice those skills
- Helped patients set goals for using the skills

- Encouraged problem solving

Patients in the program got handouts for each session. They also got an audio guide for muscle relaxation. Patients filled out surveys at the start of the program and three and nine months after the program ended.

Patients, doctors, and public health workers gave feedback throughout the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Patients in the study lived in one region of North Carolina. Results may differ in other locations. Also, 20 percent of patients in the program went to fewer

than two sessions. The low attendance may have affected the study's results.

Future research could continue to explore ways to help African Americans with hip or knee arthritis cope with pain. Researchers could also look at ways to improve attendance at training sessions.

How can people use the results?

African Americans with arthritis and their doctors could use these results when considering ways to manage arthritis pain.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Allen004.