PROJECT INFORMATION

November 2020

Comparing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy versus Yoga for Helping Older Adults Address High Levels of Worry

Principal investigator

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Organization

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What was the research about?

Some older adults have high levels of worry that cause them to feel restless, tired, or tense. Two ways to treat worry are yoga and cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. Yoga combines movement, breathing techniques, and meditation to help people reduce stress. CBT is a type of talk therapy. In CBT, patients learn to change patterns in their thinking to improve how they feel.

In this study, the research team compared how well yoga versus CBT helped older adults with high levels of worry to reduce worry, anxiety, and sleeping problems. The team assigned half of the older adults to CBT or yoga by chance. The other half chose between CBT and yoga.

What were the results?

After 11 weeks, older adults who received CBT and those who took yoga classes had less worry, anxiety, and sleeping problems. Compared with those taking yoga, adults receiving CBT reported fewer sleeping problems. Both groups had similar decreases in worry and anxiety.

These changes were the same whether older adults chose their treatment or the research team assigned it. Choosing treatment didn't affect whether older adults followed their treatment plan or stayed in the study.

Who was in the study?

The study included 500 older adults with high levels of worry. Of these, 79 percent were white, 15 percent were black, and 6 percent were other races. Average age was 67, and 86 percent were women.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned adults to one of the two treatment groups, or to choose between the groups. Of the 250 older adults who chose between CBT and yoga, 120 chose CBT and 130 chose yoga.

The group receiving CBT had 10 weekly phone sessions with a therapist. Sessions were 45–50 minutes. This group also received a workbook that described techniques and included a homework exercise so adults could practice.

The second group took two yoga classes each week for 10 weeks at local community sites. Classes focused on breathing, posture, and relaxation. The research team also asked adults to practice yoga for 15–20 minutes at least five times a week.

The adults completed surveys about worry, anxiety, and sleep at the start of the study and after 6 and 11 weeks. After 11 weeks, the research team looked at whether older adults who chose their treatment followed their treatment plan and stayed in the study.

Patients, doctors, and community organizations gave input throughout the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Most adults in the study were white women. Results may differ for other racial and gender groups. Because the research team didn't compare the older adults doing CBT and yoga with a group that didn't get help with their worry, the team doesn't know if the changes were due to CBT and yoga, or something else.

Future research could compare CBT versus yoga with people from other race and gender backgrounds.

How can people use the results?

Older adults and their doctors can use these results when considering ways to reduce high levels of worry.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Brenes344.