

Meditation provides hope for people with depression

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People with severe and recurrent depression could benefit from a new form of therapy that combines ancient forms of meditation with modern cognitive behaviour therapy, early-stage research by Oxford University psychologists suggests.

The results of a small-scale randomised trial of the approach, called mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), in currently depressed patients are published in the journal *Behaviour Research and Therapy*.

28 people currently suffering from [depression](#), having also had previous episodes of depression and thoughts of suicide, were randomly assigned into two groups. One received MBCT in addition to treatment as usual, while the other just received treatment as usual. Treatment with MBCT

reduced the number of patients with [major depression](#), while it remained the same in the other group.

MBCT brings together modern cognitive behaviour therapy with the ancient practice of mindfulness meditation. Participants are given classes that include meditation learning, education about depression, and advice on how best participants can look after themselves when their feelings threaten to overwhelm them. One way that the treatment benefits people is helping them to live more in the moment, rather than be caught up in upsetting memories from the past or worries about the future.

Professor Mark Williams and colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Oxford will follow up the promising preliminary evidence from this small-scale study. They hope to do follow up work with patients to reveal whether MBCT can also help reduce the risk of relapse. The Oxford team are currently carrying out a larger study that will compare MBCT with a group form of cognitive [therapy](#) to pinpoint which elements of meditation or talking therapies can help which people.

The study coincides with National Depression Awareness Week. More than one in five people will become depressed at some point in their lives, and each year more than 5000 people in the UK die by suicide. Although depression is a common problem, there is still much to learn about the best ways to support and treat sufferers. Once a person has been depressed several times, their risk of becoming depressed again is high, without appropriate treatment and support, and many people live in fear of another episode.

Professor Williams, who developed the treatment and led this study, said: 'We are on the brink of discovering really important things about how people can learn to stay well after depression. Our aim is to help people to find long-term freedom from the daily battle with their

moods.'

People who would like to be involved in these studies can get more information at www.staying-well.org .

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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