

Could new psychological treatment be a viable alternative to anti-depressants?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), an emerging psychological treatment which focuses on targeting negative thinking and behaviour, is the subject of new research at the Universities of Bristol and Exeter into ways to prevent relapse of depression without prescription drugs.

The researchers will recruit patients with a history of [recurrent depression](#) to take part in the PREVENT trial, funded by a £1.8million grant from the National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment (NIHR HTA) programme.

Local GPs will be invited to refer people who are suffering from repeat bouts of [depression](#) to the trial. People with a history of recurrent depression who are interested in taking part can also contact the trial team directly.

The researchers aim to recruit 420 people with a history of depression for the study. Half will be offered MBCT in eight weekly two-hour classes for up to 15 people. These participants will be invited to come off their anti-depressant drugs while practising MBCT. The other half will be asked to continue with their current [antidepressant treatment](#) for the two-year duration of the study.

A previous smaller study conducted by Professor Willem Kuyken in Exeter suggested that MBCT could be as effective in preventing a relapse as continuing with anti-depressants. The new study will be able to find out if MBCT could be a viable option to prevent relapse for the large numbers of people suffering from depression who rely on medication to stay well.

Professor Willem Kuyken of the University of Exeter who is leading the study said: “Anti-depressants are widely used by people who suffer from depression and that’s because there is evidence that they work. However, while they are very effective in keeping people well, people who come off them are vulnerable to relapse. MBCT takes a different approach - it teaches people skills for life.

“The results of our research so far are very promising. This study will help us determine if it could be a viable alternative to [prescription drugs](#) for a large number of people.”

Professor Glyn Lewis at the University of Bristol said: “Depression is a serious and disabling condition that can often recur. If this new approach is cost-effective it will provide another option for people who fear their depression might return.”

MBCT was developed by a team of psychologists from Toronto (Zindel Segal), Oxford (Mark Williams) and Cambridge (John Teasdale) in 2002 to help people who suffer repeated bouts of depression.

The PREVENT team is led by Professor Willem Kuyken from the University of Exeter in collaboration with Professor Glyn Lewis at the University of Bristol, Dr Sarah Byford at Kings College London, Dr Tim Dalgleish at the Medical Research Council and Drs Richard Byng and Rod Taylor at the Peninsula Medical School.

Provided by University of Bristol

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