

Mindfulness at school reduces likelihood of depression-related symptoms in adolescents

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Secondary school students who follow an in-class mindfulness program report reduced indications of depression, anxiety and stress up to six months later. Moreover, these students were less likely to develop pronounced depression-like symptoms. The study, conducted by Professor Filip Raes (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven), is the first to examine mindfulness in a large sample of adolescents in a school-based setting.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation therapy focused on exercising 'attentiveness'. Depression is often rooted in a downward spiral of [negative feelings](#) and worries. Once a person learns to more quickly recognise these feelings and thoughts, he or she can intervene before depression sinks in.

While mindfulness has already been widely tested and applied in patients with depression, this is the first time the method has been studied in a large group of [adolescents](#) in a school-based setting, using a randomised controlled design. The study was carried out at five [middle schools](#) in Flanders, Belgium. About 400 students between the ages of 13 and 20 took part. The students were divided into a test group and a control group. The test group received mindfulness training, and the control group received no training. Before the study, both groups completed a [questionnaire](#) with questions indicative of depression, stress or [anxiety symptoms](#). Both groups completed the questionnaire again directly after the training, and then a third time six months later.

Before the start of the training, both the test group (21%) and the control group (24%) had a similar percentage of students reporting evidence of depression. After the mindfulness training, that number was significantly lower in the test group: 15% versus 27% in the control group. This difference persisted six months after the training: 16% of the test group versus 31% of the [control group](#) reported evidence of depression. The results suggest that mindfulness can lead to a decrease in symptoms associated with depression and, moreover, that it protects against the later development of depression-like symptoms.

The study was carried out in cooperation with the Belgian not-for-profit Mindfulness and with support from the Go for Happiness Foundation.

More information: School-Based Prevention and Reduction of Depression in Adolescents: a Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial of a Mindfulness Group Program, Filip Raes, James W. Griffith, Katleen Van der Gucht, J. Mark G. Williams, Springer, March 2013, [DOI 10.1007/s12671-013-0202-1](#)

Provided by KU Leuven

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