

Psychotherapy via the Internet as good as if not better than face-to-face consultations

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Does psychotherapy via the Internet work? For the first time, clinical researchers from the University of Zurich have studied whether online psychotherapy and conventional face-to-face therapy are equally effective in experiments. Based on earlier studies, the Zurich team assumed that the two forms of therapy were on a par. Not only was their theory confirmed, the results for online therapy even exceeded their expectations.

Six therapists treated 62 patients, the majority of whom were suffering from [moderate depression](#). The patients were divided into two equal groups at random and assigned to one of the therapeutic forms. The treatment consisted of eight sessions with different established techniques that stem from [cognitive behavior therapy](#) and could be carried out both orally and in writing. Patients treated online had to perform one predetermined written task per therapy unit – such as querying their own negative self-image. They were known to the therapist by name.

Online therapy even more effective in the medium term

"In both groups, the depression values fell significantly," says Professor Andreas Maercker, summing up the results of the study. At the end of the treatment, no more depression could be diagnosed in 53 percent of the patients who underwent online therapy – compared to 50 percent for

face-to-face therapy. Three months after completing the treatment, the depression in patients treated online even decreased whereas those treated conventionally only displayed a minimal decline: no more depression could be detected in 57 percent of patients from online therapy compared to 42 percent with [conventional therapy](#).

For both [patient groups](#), the degree of [satisfaction](#) with the treatment and therapists was more or less equally high. 96 percent of the patients given online therapy and 91 percent of the recipients of conventional treatment rated the contact with their therapist as "personal". In the case of online therapy, the patients tended to use the therapy contacts and subsequent homework very intensively to progress personally. For instance, they indicated that they had re-read the correspondence with their therapist from time to time. "In the medium term, online [psychotherapy](#) even yields better results. Our study is evidence that psychotherapeutic services on the internet are an effective supplement to therapeutic care," concludes Maercker.

Provided by University of Zurich

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