

Twice weekly yoga classes plus home practice effective in reducing symptoms of depression

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Credit: Anna Langova/public domain

People who suffer from depression should participate in yoga and deep (coherent) breathing classes at least twice weekly plus practice at home to receive a significant reduction in their symptoms.

The findings, which appear in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, provide preliminary support for the use of yoga-based interventions as an alternative or supplement to pharmacologic treatments for depression.

Major depressive disorder (MDD) is common, recurrent, chronic and disabling. Due in part to its prevalence, depression is globally responsible for more years lost to disability than any other disease. Up to 40 percent of individuals treated with antidepressant medications for MDD do not achieve full remission. This study used Iyengar yoga that has an emphasis on detail, precision and alignment in the performance of posture and breath control.

Individuals with MDD were randomized to the high dose group, three 90-minute classes a week along with home practice, or the low dose group, two 90-minute classes a week, plus home practice. Both groups had significant decreases in their [depressive symptoms](#) and no significant differences in compliance. Although a greater number of subjects in the high dose group had less depressive symptoms, the researchers believe attending twice weekly classes (plus home practice) may constitute a less burdensome but still effective way to gain the mood benefits from the intervention.

"This study supports the use of a yoga and coherent breathing intervention in [major depressive disorder](#) in people who are not on antidepressants and in those who have been on a stable dose of antidepressants and have not achieved a resolution of their symptoms," explained corresponding author Chris Streeter, MD, associate professor of psychiatry and neurology at Boston University School of Medicine and a psychiatrist at Boston Medical Center.

According to Streeter compared with mood altering medications, this intervention has the advantages of avoiding additional drug side effects

and drug interactions. "While most pharmacologic treatment for depression target monoamine systems, such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, this intervention targets the parasympathetic and [gamma aminobutyric acid](#) system and provides a new avenue for treatment."

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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