

Study finds yoga and meditation reduce chronic pain

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A mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course was found to benefit patients with chronic pain and depression, leading to significant improvement in participant perceptions of pain, mood and functional

capacity, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*. Most of the study respondents (89%) reported the program helped them find ways to better cope with their pain while 11% remained neutral.

Chronic [pain](#) is a common and serious medical condition affecting an estimated 100 million people in the United States, which correlates with annual costs of approximately \$635 billion. The [small-scale study](#) was conducted in a semi-rural population in Oregon where issues of affordability, addiction and access to care are common. Participants received intensive instruction in [mindfulness meditation](#) and mindful hatha yoga during an eight-week period.

"Many people have lost hope because, in most cases, [chronic pain](#) will never fully resolve," says Cynthia Marske, DO, an osteopathic physician and director of graduate [medical education](#) at the Community Health Clinics of Benton and Linn County. "However, mindful yoga and [meditation](#) can help improve the structure and function of the body, which supports the process of healing."

Healing and curing are inherently different, explains Dr. Marske.

"Curing means eliminating disease, while healing refers to becoming more whole," Dr. Marske says. "With chronic pain, healing involves learning to live with a level of pain this is manageable. For this, yoga and meditation can be very beneficial."

The study found mindful meditation and yoga led to significant improvements in patients' perceptions of pain, depression and disability. Following the course, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) scores, a standard measure of depression, dropped by 3.7 points on a 27-point scale. According to Dr. Marske, some patients experience a similar drop from the use of an antidepressant.

"Chronic pain often goes hand-in-hand with depression," says Dr. Marske. "Mindfulness-based meditation and yoga can help restore both a patient's mental and physical health and can be effective alone or in combination with other treatments such as therapy and medication."

Study participants received instruction in MBSR, a systematic educational program based on training people to have an awareness of the self in the present moment and a nonjudgmental manner. The findings bolster other evidence that MBSR can be a useful adjunctive treatment for chronic pain while improving perceived depression.

"The bottom line is that patients are seeking new ways to cope with chronic pain and effective non-pharmaceutical treatments are available," says Dr. Marske. "Our findings show meditation and yoga can be a viable option for people seeking relief from chronic pain."

More information: Cynthia Marske et al, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in the Management of Chronic Pain and Its Comorbid Depression, *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* (2020). [DOI: 10.7556/jaoa.2020.096](https://doi.org/10.7556/jaoa.2020.096)

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