

Phone apps can improve caregiver mental health

November 10 2021, by Courtney Teryek



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Those who care for older adults suffering with memory loss and other cognitive impairments can significantly reduce their depression, stress, and anxiety by focusing on what is going on at the moment and engaging

in mindfulness therapy, according to new Rutgers research.

The study, published in *Aging & Mental Health*, examined the feasibility, acceptability, and usefulness of Mindfulness Coach, a mobile application designed to teach people how to practice [mindfulness](#).

"Caregiving can be extremely stressful and time consuming. Caregivers don't always have time to seek out the services that they may need, like therapy," said Elissa Kozlov, instructor in the Department of Health Behavior, Society, and Policy at the Rutgers School of Public Health. "However, our study has indicated that mHealth strategies, such as the Mindfulness Coach app, fits well into caregivers' busy lives and has the potential to improve their mental health and wellbeing."

Unpaid caregivers, who are often relatives and friends, are the ones who usually provide the largest portion of support to those who require medical assistance. Since this care is often for a prolonged period, they can experience a higher level of stress and anxiety.

Mindfulness therapy, the technique behind the Mindfulness Coach App, provides stress and anxiety management through psychoeducation, guided meditation, and mindfulness exercises to reduce symptoms of stress and depression. It was created by a team at the National Center for PTSD Research at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The researchers, interested in determining whether mindfulness therapy would have comparable positive implications on caregivers of older adults with cognitive impairments, studied a sample of family caregivers over eight weeks to assess anxiety and depression levels, [caregiver](#) burden, application user experience and satisfaction, and total application usage time.

They found that as caregivers engaged more with the app, symptoms of

anxiety, [stress](#), [depression](#), and caregiver burden decreased.

"The mobile application provides patient centered treatments to individuals with increased responsibilities and stressors," adds Paul Duberstein, chair and professor in the Department of Health Behavior, Society, and Policy at the school. "The Mindfulness Coach application is a user-friendly, feasible option for this population of caregivers and has yielded positive results."

The results of this study suggest mobile health interventions can positively impact future mental health treatment options for patients through scalability and accessibility.

Study co-authors include faculty from other collaborating institutions and research centers.

More information: Elissa Kozlov et al, The feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of an mHealth mindfulness therapy for caregivers of adults with cognitive impairment, *Aging & Mental Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/13607863.2021.1963949](https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2021.1963949)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: Phone apps can improve caregiver mental health (2021, November 10) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-apps-caregiver-mental-health.html>

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