

# Fibromyalgia sufferers see chronic pain symptoms reduced in new meditation therapy study

27 February 2018, by Gemma Bradley

A team of academics has conducted the first study into the effectiveness of compassion meditation for treating fibromyalgia, a debilitating pain condition, which recently hit the headlines for causing Lady Gaga to cancel her world tour.

The study, which compared Attachment-based Compassion Therapy (ABCT) with relaxation techniques for treating fibromyalgia, was assessed by researchers from the University of Derby, the Awake to Wisdom Centre for Meditation and Mindfulness Research in Italy, and the Primary Care Prevention and Health Promotion Research Network, University of Zaragoza and Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu in Spain.

As the chronic pain disorder affects approximately three percent of adults in the UK and Europe with more women diagnosed than men, the team ran the study trial among 42 diagnosed women, split into two groups.

Compared to the relaxation control group, participants in the compassion therapy group demonstrated significant improvements across a range of psychological outcomes and reduced fibromyalgia symptoms by 36 percent overall.

Dr. William Van Gordon, Lecturer in Psychology at University of Derby Online Learning, said: "The effectiveness of pharmacological treatments for fibromyalgia, such as anti-depressants, has long been questioned and can lead to unwanted side effects. The aim of this study was to investigate the use of [compassion meditation](#) as an alternative treatment for fibromyalgia.

"Following the study, most participants in the ABCT group showed significant improvements and some no longer met the diagnostic criteria for fibromyalgia.

"As fibromyalgia is linked with sickness-related absence from work, incapacity to work, reduced work productivity and high usage of health-care resources, these results are not only meaningful for the sufferers but could help to address the problem of absence from work and the cost implications of this."

The compassion therapy involved group sessions and daily homework assignments. Compassion meditation exercises were used to focus on cultivating a recognition and understanding of the universality of suffering, an emotional connection with others' suffering, and motivation to act to alleviate suffering.

Fibromyalgia symptoms were measured before and after the trial using the Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire (FIQ), an instrument developed to assess the current health status of women with fibromyalgia syndrome in clinical and research settings.

Before the start of trial, both the compassion therapy group and control group had an FIQ average score of over 60. A score of 59 or more corresponds to a severe level of fibromyalgia symptoms. After the trial, the average score for the mediation group fell to 44, but the average score for the control group remained above 60.

While some symptoms were still likely to be present for participants in the ABCT group, they no were longer deemed to be severe. A reduction of at least 14 percent is deemed to be clinically important, but in this study the reduction in symptoms was in the order of 36 percent for [fibromyalgia](#), 30 percent for psychological flexibility, 45 percent for anxiety, 54 percent for depression, and 38 percent for quality of life.

Provided by University of Derby

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