

Mindfulness combined with hypnotherapy aids highly stressed people, study finds

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A new treatment for stress which combines mindfulness with hypnotherapy has shown positive results in a Baylor University pilot study.

The [intervention](#) is called "mindful hypnotherapy."

"Mindfulness is a type of meditation that involves focusing attention on present moment awareness. It can help people cope with [stress](#), but can require months of practice and training," said researcher Gary Elkins, Ph.D., director of the Mind-Body Medicine Research Laboratory at Baylor University. "Hypnosis also involves focusing attention, but it includes mental imagery, relaxation and suggestions for symptom reduction."

Hypnosis interventions are typically brief and have been used in pain and symptom management in [clinical practice](#).

The study's basic premise is that using hypnosis to deliver mindfulness goals could have many advantages, Elkins said.

"Combining mindfulness and hypnotherapy in a single session is a novel intervention that may be equal to or better than existing treatments, with the advantage of being more time-effective, less daunting and easier to use," he said. "This could be a valuable option for treating anxiety and stress reduction."

As a brief intervention, mindful therapy could be widely disseminated and is an innovative new mind-body therapy, he said.

The study is published in the *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*.

Elkins noted that while mindfulness by itself can be an effective treatment for stress and anxiety for some people, it typically is provided in eight weekly sessions that last two hours or more each week and include an all-day retreat of eight or more hours. That amount of time—more than 24 therapy hours—may be a burden in cost and time for some people. Also, research has not shown that mindfulness-based treatments are consistently superior to standard cognitive behavioral

therapy, he said.

For the study of mindful hypnotherapy, the Baylor research team recruited 42 individuals with self-reported high stress. Half took part in an intervention of one-hour weekly individual sessions that included hypnosis inductions and suggestions for greater mindfulness. Participants also were given self-hypnosis audio recordings lasting about 20 minutes, each with suggestions for a hypnotic induction, relaxation and greater mindfulness.

The second group did not take part in the intervention.

Intervention material focused on present-moment awareness, nonjudgmental awareness of the five senses, nonjudgmental awareness of thoughts and feelings, self-hypnosis, compassion for self and others, awareness of personal values and meaning in life and transition to long-term practice of mindful hypnotherapy, Elkins said.

At study's end, the intervention group reported a large decrease in stress and a significant increase in mindfulness. Most were highly satisfied with the number of sessions, the ease of home practice and the clarity of content, Elkins said. The average participant practiced almost every day, and overall satisfaction with the intervention was 8.9 on a scale of 10.

In comparison, those who did not participate in the intervention reported no significant difference between pre- and post-study stress level.

A limitation of the study was its small sample size, Elkins said. Future studies of a larger number of people could be of value, as well as testing mindful [hypnotherapy](#) for such concerns as anxiety, depression or chronic pain, he said.

More information: Nicholas Olendzki et al, Mindful Hypnotherapy to

Reduce Stress and Increase Mindfulness: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Study, *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/00207144.2020.1722028](https://doi.org/10.1080/00207144.2020.1722028)

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