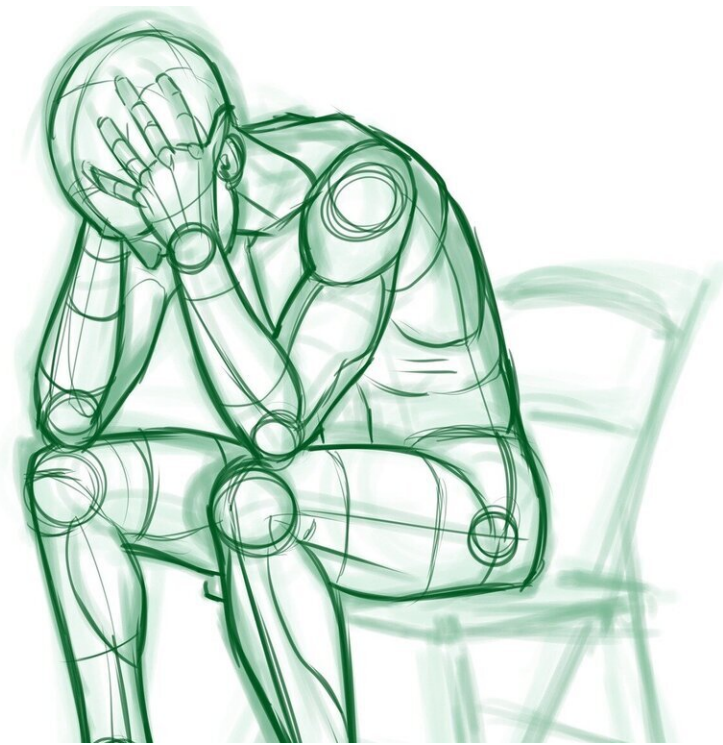# Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy benefits people with depression through promoting self-kindness

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New research shows that Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) can help promote self-kindness in people with a history of depression, thereby putting their bodies in a state of safety and

relaxation.

The research, led by the University of Exeter with collaboration from the universities of Oxford and Magdeburg, indicates that MBCT may help break the cycle of highly critical thoughts and feelings of worthlessness, which often lead people with depression to relapse.

Participants treated with MBCT showed a pattern of being kind to themselves, along with body responses of reduced threat response, a state of safety and relaxation that is important for regeneration and healing.

The authors believe the study helps to better understand how MBCT prevents relapse.

MBCT is an effective group-based psychological treatment that helps people change the way they think and feel about their experiences and learn skills that reduce the likelihood of further episodes of depression.

Previous research has shown that individuals with recurrent depression benefit particularly from MBCT when they learn to become more compassionate towards themselves.

This increased self-compassion has been defined as the ability to be kind to ourselves in stressful times.

The researchers studied 50 people who were in remission from depression and at risk for depressive relapse.

25 of this group were tested before and after an eight-week MBCT treatment and compared with an untreated control sample of 25 people with recurrent depression.

Dr. Hans Kirschner, of the University of Magdeburg, the first author of

the study, said that "it's encouraging to see that an evidence-based treatment like MBCT can help individuals with recurrent depression to move to a kinder self view and a related body state of safety. We hope that this can strengthen individuals' resilience and prevent depressive relapse. Though, this idea must be tested formally in future research."

In contrast, the untreated control group showed body responses indicative of a more adverse response to the self-compassion meditation when they engaged in it a second time.

The study builds on the team's previous research that found that a brief self-compassion exercise can temporarily activate a pattern of self-kindness and feeling safe in healthy individuals.

The researchers wanted to explore this effect in people with depression, and found that the self-compassion exercise alone was not sufficient to bring about the feeling of safety, but that MCBT did so effectively.

Professor Anke Karl, from the University of Exeter, lead author of the study, said that "this study extends our previous research that found that a brief self-compassion exercise can temporarily activate a pattern of self-kindness and feeling safe in healthy individuals but in individuals with recurrent depression this is unlikely to happen without going through an effective psychological therapy that we know addresses vulnerability to relapse."

The research was published in *Mindfulness*.

Provided by University of Exeter