Title
Body awareness and the practice of yoga or meditation in 435 primary care patients with past or current low back pain.

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Background

Low back pain (LBP) is the most common reason for patients to seek integrative medicine care. Neurologically, perceived pain is an element of interoceptive body awareness. Body awareness (BA) describes how we attend to our body and to pain. Yoga and meditation may help pain patients through improved BA, but BA has rarely been assessed in this population.

Objective

● to provide the first quantitative data on Body Awareness in primary care patients with past or current LBP,

● to compare those who practiced yoga and/or meditation with those who did not.

Methods

Design: 2-year observational cohort study; secondary data analysis.

Setting: large health care system: Kaiser Permanente, Northern California.

Subjects: 435 primary care patients, who had acute LBP at inception.

Measures: The Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA) questionnaire assesses 8 dimensions of BA: noticing, distracting, worrying, attention regulation, emotional awareness, self-regulation, body-listening, and trusting.

Analysis: At follow-up, we compared rates of non-recovery (chronic pain) and MAIA scores between those who practiced a form of mind-body therapy and those who did not.

Results

Higher levels of yoga and meditation experience [4 levels] were associated with higher Body Awareness scores (MAIA). The risk of having chronic pain 2 years after a first episode of acute low back pain was reduced by 38% (p = .041) in those who reported more than “a taste of” meditation experience and by 35% (p = .047) reporting any type of mind-body therapy experience.

Table 2: Self-Reported Interoceptive Awareness in a Cohort of Acute Low Back Pain Patients at 2-Year Follow-Up

Table 3: Proportion of Chronic Pain at 2 Years

Conclusions

● Primary care patients with Acute Low Back Pain were followed for 2 years. Those who reported having experience with yoga and/or meditation also reported higher levels of Body Awareness compared to those without such experience.

● Patients with mind-body experience reportedly (1) used more Self-Regulation, i.e. calming oneself by focusing attention on breath and body sensations when overwhelmed or distressed, and (2) listened more to the body.

● Mind-body therapies were associated with better recovery from acute low back pain.