

Does mindfulness help people with epilepsy?

Source: Wood, K et al. *Mindfulness-based interventions in epilepsy: a systematic review. BMC Neurology (2017) 17:52*

Plain Language Summary

People with epilepsy can feel a lack of control due to the unpredictability of recurrent seizures. Anti-epileptic drugs are the current (first line) treatment for epilepsy. However, there can be unpleasant side effects as a result which impact on daily activities including employment and social activities. Both of these aspects can result in stress which is a well-known trigger for seizures. Stress has also been reported as a risk factor for the development of anxiety and depression (Lee, 2010). Stress, anxiety and depression can have a negative impact on both mental and physical wellbeing.

Mindfulness-based interventions (or stress reduction methods) are becoming more and more popular in the management of long-term health conditions such as recurrent depression, stroke and multiple sclerosis. Given that stress, anxiety and depression are high in people with epilepsy, stress reduction methods are a suitable non-drug treatment option. It is not clear if stress reduction methods are effective in people with epilepsy.

Researchers from the UK systematically searched the medical literature and reviewed all available studies looking at the effectiveness of mindfulness based interventions in adults with epilepsy. Mindfulness-based intervention studies were included only, studies that used only some aspects were excluded. There were a total of 3 randomised controlled studies identified, with 2 completed in the USA and 1 in China involving 231 participants. The studies were also assessed for their risk of bias, a measure of how much error or the degree that we can trust the results or conclusions of the studies.

The researchers found that:

- In each of the studies identified some improvement in depression symptoms (all studies), anxiety, depression knowledge and skills, and quality of life (or wellbeing) was found for people with epilepsy
- Two studies were assessed with a high risk of bias (less trustworthy) and one study with a low risk (more trustworthy)
- The study that was assessed with a low risk found a significant improvement in wellbeing for people with epilepsy using mindfulness therapy (delivered in person) after 6 weeks

Overall, there is only **limited evidence** for the use of mindfulness-based interventions for people with epilepsy. Although the findings of all of the studies were **positive** (there may be some improvement in wellbeing), two of the studies were assessed with a high risk of bias. These findings are supported by a review which included all types of studies (McKee and Privitera, 2017), not only randomised controlled trials. However, further high quality studies are required to confirm the positive findings.

Other methods such as yoga and acceptance and commitment therapy have found some promising results for reducing stress and improving quality of life in people with epilepsy. However, there is no reliable evidence is available to support their use and further trials are therefore needed (Panebianco, 2015).

Written by Loretta Piccenna, PhD, BSc (Hons) – June 2017

References/additional information

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Keywords

Mindfulness, interventions, long-term conditions, cope, stress, anxiety and depression