

Transcendental Meditation for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, and Anxiety: A Review

Context

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression are prevalent mental health disorders in Canada. A recent study reported that more than 13% of Canadian military personnel suffered from a mental health disorder following their deployment to Afghanistan. PTSD was the most common diagnosis at 8%. Depression was the next most common at 6% — with 60% also having PTSD. The rate of any anxiety disorder was approximately 10%.

Technology

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a type of mantra meditation that originated from the Vedic tradition of enlightenment in India and popularized 50 years ago by the late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Transcendental Meditation and TM are registered trademarks of the Maharishi Vedic Education Development Corporation. TM involves silently repeating a word or a phrase (called a mantra) until the mind is free of thought. It is practised for 15 to 20 minutes twice daily, in a sitting position. It requires no other lifestyle modification and is not religious in nature.

Issue

Meditation may be used alone or as adjunct therapy to reduce symptoms associated with mental health and stress-related disorders. However, its effectiveness is uncertain. A review of the clinical effectiveness of TM for adults with PTSD, anxiety disorders, and depression will help to inform treatment decisions for these patients.

Methods

A limited literature search was conducted of key resources, and titles and abstracts of the retrieved publications were reviewed. Full-text publications were evaluated for final article selection according to predetermined selection criteria (population, intervention, comparator, outcomes, and study designs).

Key Messages

For the treatment of PTSD, depression, and anxiety in adults:

- It is uncertain whether Transcendental Meditation is an effective treatment modality.
- The use of Transcendental Meditation as a treatment for mental illness needs to be evaluated in larger-scale studies.

Results

The literature search identified 365 citations. After screening the abstracts, 34 studies were deemed potentially relevant and an additional 3 articles were identified from other sources. Of these, 4 systematic reviews met the criteria for inclusion in this review.

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