

Research evaluates effectiveness of yoga in treating major depression

May 8 2017



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When treating depression, the goal is to help individuals achieve full recovery and normal functioning. While traditional treatment such as medication or psychotherapy is effective for many patients, some may

not fully recover even with these treatments. Researchers sought to determine if the addition of hatha yoga would improve treatment outcomes for these patients. They found that the benefits of yoga were less pronounced early in treatment, but may accumulate over time.

The research, entitled "Adjunctive yoga v. health education for persistent major [depression](#): a [randomized controlled trial](#)," has been published in *Psychological Medicine*. The research was led by Lisa Uebelacker, PhD, a research psychologist in the Psychosocial Research Department at Butler Hospital, a Care New England hospital, and an associate professor of psychiatry and human behavior at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University. The team also included Gary Epstein-Lubow, MD; Ana M. Abrantes, PhD; Audrey Tyrka, MD, PhD; Brandon A. Gaudiano, PhD; and Ivan W. Miller III, PhD, of Butler Hospital and the Warren Alpert Medical School; Geoffrey Tremont, PhD and Tanya Tran of Rhode Island Hospital and the Warren Alpert Medical School; Tom Gillette of Eyes of the World Yoga; and David Strong of the University of California, San Diego.

"The purpose of this study was to examine whether hatha yoga is effective for treating depression when used in addition to [antidepressant medication](#)," explained Dr. Uebelacker. "We did not see statistically significant differences between hatha yoga and a control group (health education) at 10 weeks, however, when we examined outcomes over a period of time including the three and six months after yoga classes ended, we found yoga was superior to health education in alleviating [depression symptoms](#)."

According to Dr. Uebelacker, this is the largest study of yoga for depression to date. The team enrolled individuals with current or recent major depression who were receiving antidepressant medication and continued to have clinically significant depression symptoms. Participants were randomized into two groups - those who participated

in a hatha yoga class and a control group who took part in a [health education](#) class. The intervention phase lasted 10 weeks and participants were followed for six months afterward.

"We hypothesized that yoga participants would show lower depression severity over time as assessed by the Quick Inventory of Depression Symptomatology (QIDS), as well as better social and role functioning, better general health perceptions and physical functioning, and less physical pain relative to the [control group](#)," said Dr. Uebelacker. "We found that [yoga](#) did indeed have an impact on depression symptoms."

More information: L. A. Uebelacker et al. Adjunctive yoga v. health education for persistent major depression: a randomized controlled trial, *Psychological Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1017/S0033291717000575](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291717000575)

Provided by Care New England

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