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Commentary

Mind-Body Medicine in Practice: Yoga's Impact on Chronic Low Back Pain

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DESCRIPTION

Chronic Low Back Pain (CLBP) is one of the most prevalent musculoskeletal disorders worldwide, contributing significantly to disability, lost productivity, and diminished quality of life. Despite various treatment approaches including medications, physical therapy, and lifestyle modifications, many individuals continue to experience persistent discomfort and functional limitations. With growing interest in non-pharmacological and holistic treatment strategies, yoga has emerged as a promising complementary intervention. This article reports the findings of a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) designed to assess the effectiveness of yoga in managing CLBP.

The trial enrolled 120 participants aged between 25 and 60 years who had been experiencing non-specific CLBP for a duration of more than 12 weeks. Participants were randomly assigned into two groups: a yoga intervention group and a control group receiving standard care, which included physiotherapy and prescribed analgesics. The yoga group engaged in instructor-led sessions three times per week for 12 weeks. Each session lasted 60 minutes and consisted of specific asanas (postures) aimed at improving spinal alignment, flexibility, and core strength, combined with pranayama (breathing exercises) and brief mindfulness meditation.

To evaluate the outcomes, pain intensity was measured using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), and functional disability was assessed through the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI). Secondary measures included assessments of mental well-being, using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), and quality of life, evaluated through the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36). Prior to the intervention, baseline measurements were made, and after six and twelve weeks, follow-ups were carried out.

The results demonstrated that participants in the yoga group experienced significantly greater reductions in pain and disability compared to the control group. At the end of 12 weeks, the average VAS score in the yoga group dropped by 2.8 points, compared to a 1.2-point reduction in the control group ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, the ODI scores showed a more pronounced improvement in the yoga group, with an 18.5-point reduction in functional disability versus a 7.3-point reduction in the control group ($p < 0.01$). Participants also reported notable improvements in mood, stress reduction, and overall quality of life.

These findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of yoga in managing chronic low back pain. Yoga not only addresses the physical aspects of CLBP through improved flexibility, posture, and core strength, but also contributes to psychological resilience and emotional regulation. The incorporation of breathing techniques and meditation likely plays a role in reducing stress-related exacerbation of pain symptoms, which is particularly relevant given the biopsychosocial nature of chronic pain conditions.

Crucially, the study revealed no adverse events, confirming that yoga is a safe activity when done under the supervision of qualified teachers. Adherence to the program was high, with over 85% of participants in the yoga group attending at least 75% of the sessions, suggesting that yoga is a feasible and well-accepted modality for individuals suffering from CLBP.

While the study provides robust evidence supporting the short-term effectiveness of yoga for CLBP, it also underscores the need for further research into long-term outcomes and maintenance strategies. Future studies might explore whether home-based yoga practice or digital interventions can sustain the benefits observed in clinical settings. Additionally, cost-effectiveness analyses could strengthen the case for integrating yoga into mainstream treatment pathways for chronic pain.

CONCLUSION

This randomized control trial provides compelling evidence that yoga is a safe, effective, and holistic approach to managing chronic low back pain. By combining physical postures with breathwork and mindfulness, yoga offers an integrative solution that addresses both the physical and psychological dimensions of chronic pain. Given its accessibility and minimal risk profile, yoga should be considered a valuable adjunct to conventional therapies in the comprehensive management of CLBP.

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