

Format: Abstract

Altern Ther Health Med. 2007 Sep-Oct;13(5):26-35.

Outcomes of a mind-body treatment program for chronic back pain with no distinct structural pathology--a case series of patients diagnosed and treated as tension myositis syndrome.

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Abstract

CONTEXT: Chronic, nonspecific back pain is a ubiquitous problem that has frustrated both physicians and patients. Some have suggested that it is time for a "paradigm shift" in treating it. One of them is John Sarno, MD, of New York University's Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation, who has argued for this in 4 books and several journal publications. We believe that a mind-body approach is more effective and involves much less risk and expense than conventional approaches in appropriately diagnosed cases.

OBJECTIVE: To determine if a mind-body treatment program addressing a presumed psychological etiology of persistent back pain merits further research.

DESIGN: Case series outcome study.

SETTING: Single physician's office in metropolitan Los Angeles.

PATIENTS: Fifty-one patients with chronic back pain, diagnosed with tension myositis syndrome, a diagnosis for "functional" back pain and treated in the principal investigator's office in 2002 and 2003.

INTERVENTIONS: A program of office visits, written educational materials, a structured workbook (guided journal), educational audio CDs, and, in some cases, individual psychotherapy.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Pain intensity (visual analog scale scores), quality of life (RAND SF-12), medication usage, and activity level (questionnaires). Follow-up was at least 3 to 12 months after treatment.

RESULTS: Mean VAS scores decreased 52% for "average" pain ($P < .0001$), 35% for "worst" pain ($P < .0001$), and 65% for "least" pain ($P < .0001$). SF-12 Physical Health scores rose >9 units ($P = .005$). Medication usage decreased ($P = .0008$). Activity levels increased ($P = .03$). Participants aged >47 years and in pain for >3 years benefited most.

PMID: 17900039

[PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]