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Mindfulness Therapy Helps Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders



What is this research about?

Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are at an increased risk for depression and anxiety. It is important to find programs and treatments that may help relieve these symptoms. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction may be beneficial for adults with ASD. Mindfulness involves being present in the moment, and accepting thoughts and emotions as they appear, in a non-judgmental way. This study examined how mindfulness can help adults with ASD by reducing feelings of anxiety, depression and rumination. Rumination, or thinking repetitively about something negative, is thought to be an important factor in depression and anxiety.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers randomly divided 40 adults with ASD into one of two groups. One group attended a 9-week mindfulness program and the other group was on a wait-list for the treatment. The mindfulness program involved meditation exercises, group discussions and some home practicing. Researchers used questionnaires with all the adults to measure feelings of anxiety, depression, rumination and positive mood. Both

What you need to know:

Mindfulness may have positive effects on relieving anxiety and depression symptoms in adults with ASD. The program helped relieve symptoms of anxiety, depression and rumination.

the treatment and the wait-list group completed the questionnaires before and after treatment.

What did the researchers find?

After the mindfulness program, participants showed less depression, anxiety and rumination compared to people on the waitlist. The reduction in rumination stood out as important to people feeling less anxious and depressed. Mindfulness program participants also showed more positive mood compared to those on the waitlist.

How can you use this research?

Adults with ASD can benefit from mindfulness training and use these skills to increase well-being. This is one of the first studies of its kind and the results are promising. More research

involving a larger number of participants and different assessment methods is needed. A follow up study is also needed to see if the symptom relief had a lasting effect after the study was completed. Clinicians can consider using mindfulness skills and techniques when treating anxiety and depression in adults with ASD.

About the Researchers

Annelies Spek, Nadia van Ham and Ivan Nyklicek are researchers from the Netherlands. Annelies Sek is a clinical psychologist and senior researcher at the Adult Autism Center in Eindhoven, Netherlands.

Citation

Spek, A., van Ham, N. & Nyklicek, I. (2013). Mindfulness-based therapy in adults with an autism spectrum disorder: A randomized controlled trial. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 34(1), 246-253.

Keywords

Autism, Mindfulness-Based Therapy, Rumination, Anxiety, Depression

This research summary was written by Suzanne Robinson for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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