“I felt like a new person.”

The effects of mindfulness meditation on older adults with chronic pain: qualitative narrative analysis of diary entries

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Abstract
To identify the effects of mindfulness meditation on older adults with chronic low back pain (CLBP) we conducted a qualitative study based on grounded theory and used content analysis of diary entries from older adults who had participated in a clinical trial of an eight week mindfulness meditation program. Participants were 27 adults ≥ 65 years with CLBP of at least moderate severity and of at least three months duration. We found several themes reflecting the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation on pain, attention, sleep, and achieving well-being. Various methods of pain reduction were used, including distraction, increased body awareness leading to behavior change, better pain coping, and direct pain reduction through meditation. Participants described improved attention skills. A number of participants reported improved sleep latency as well as quality of sleep. Participants described achieving well-being during and after a meditation session that had immediate effects on mood elevation but also long-term global effects on improved quality of life. Several themes were identified related to pain reduction, improved attention, improved sleep, and achieving well-being resulting from mindfulness meditation that suggest it has promising potential as a non-pharmacologic treatment of chronic pain for older adults.

Perspective
Community dwelling older adults with chronic low back pain experience numerous benefits from mindfulness meditation including less pain, improved attention, better sleep, more energy, enhanced well-being, and improved quality of life. Additional research is needed to determine how mindfulness meditation works and how it might help with other chronic illnesses.