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Mindfulness-Based Energy Conservation Intervention for Persons with Multiple Sclerosis & Fatigue: Pilot Study

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Introduction: Persons suffering from chronic disease commonly experience multiple symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety, and depression that compromise occupational performance and quality of life. We chose to design an innovative, interdisciplinary intervention that addresses these multiple symptoms by combining two educational interventions that have growing support in the literature. One intervention was a well-established energy conservation course (Mathiowetz et al., 2005; Packer et al., 1995), while the other intervention was adopted from Linehan's (1993) Dialectical Behavior Therapy intervention including mindfulness strategies. The combined intervention included 12 weekly group sessions with an occupational therapist and a licensed clinical psychologist as well as weekly individual therapy sessions.

Objectives: Participants will be able to...

1. Describe a community-based, educational intervention for managing multiple symptoms of persons with multiple sclerosis.
2. Describe the evidence that supports the efficacy of this Mindfulness-Based Energy Conservation (M-BEC) intervention.

Methods: The specific aim of this study was to determine the effects of M-BEC, a new community-based intervention for persons with MS and fatigue. Participants were recruited from a large Midwest USA metropolitan area. Exclusion criteria included specific psychiatric disorders and cognitive deficits. Participants ranging from 33 to 66 years of age were randomly assigned to immediate or delayed M-BEC groups.

Results: Comparison of outcomes between M-BEC (n=10) and control (n=4) periods indicated a significant decrease in Fatigue Impact Scale (FIS) scores, and a significant increase in the vitality, physical functioning, and mental health subscales of the SF-36 Health Status Survey. There were non-significant improvements in the Beck Anxiety Scale, Beck Depression Scale, and Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. However, effect sizes for all of these variables were large. The number of significant results is surprising given the relatively small sample size.

Conclusions: Given the beneficial effects found on persons with MS and fatigue, M-BEC is a promising interdisciplinary, non-pharmacological intervention that may address multiple symptoms for persons with chronic diseases such as multiple sclerosis. It warrants additional research.