

Relaxation techniques better for cancer patients than mindfulness therapy

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New research has shown that the use of Mindfulness training in cancer patients can produce negative results to their wellbeing compared to using simple relaxation techniques.

Mindfulness is the process of bringing one's full attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment in a non-judging, accepting way. It can be developed through the practice of meditation and other [training](#).

Lisa Reynolds of the University of Auckland's Department of Psychological Medicine and her colleagues, conducted the research on 68 people receiving chemotherapy at Auckland Hospital.

Participants were randomised to one of two stress management groups; one group was given basic [relaxation techniques](#), like focussing on breathing, and the other was given a brief mindfulness intervention.

The paper, "A Brief Mindfulness Intervention Is Associated with Negative Outcomes in a Randomised Controlled Trial Among

Chemotherapy Patients," was recently published in the journal *Mindfulness*.

Both groups had three 90 minute sessions, once a week over three weeks.

"We expected that both groups would be helpful for people, but that the mindfulness intervention would be more helpful," Lisa says.

"The results were not what any of us expected."

"It showed that mindfulness training can actually make things worse."

"In a [randomised controlled trial](#) we conducted with [cancer patients](#) going through chemotherapy, we found that on some important measures (symptom distress, quality of life, [social avoidance](#)) that [mindfulness training](#) actually made things temporarily worse compared to [relaxation training](#)."

Lisa says that while relaxation techniques were helpful across a range of measures, people in the mindfulness programme had temporary negative effects straight after they finished the three week programme.

"Their quality of life went down, distress about their cancer symptoms went up, and their social avoidance went up."

Three months later both groups were on an equal par again.

"Sometimes it can be really confronting to focus on your present experience."

"Mindfulness training encourages you to be more accepting of your experiences, even painful ones, but that skill can take time, training and practice to develop."

Lisa says that while mindfulness has been used for

thousands of years, recently there's been a real interest in using it in various forms and in different physical health populations like with people who have diabetes or cancer.

"There's been a real explosion in people saying how amazing it is and using it in different settings, however in this explosion of interest, people have taken at face value that it is harmless without really making sure about what it's doing."

"Our research suggests that we should be a bit more careful about how we use it, how it is being taught, and to think carefully about when it is introduced. There are some situations when we absolutely do not want to raise a person's distress, even if it is temporary."

"Mindfulness training is really helpful for lots of [people](#) in lots of situations, but we need to think carefully about the boundaries of when it might and might not be appropriate."

More information: Lisa M. Reynolds et al. A Brief Mindfulness Intervention Is Associated with Negative Outcomes in a Randomised Controlled Trial Among Chemotherapy Patients, *Mindfulness* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s12671-017-0705-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0705-2)

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