**Selected by
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Latest Publications You Should Not Miss

Crum AJ, Langer EJ: Mind-set matters: Exercise and the placebo effect. Psychol Sci 2007;18:165–171.

In a study testing whether the relationship between exercise and health is moderated by one's mind-set, 84 female room attendants working in seven different hotels were measured on physiological health variables affected by exercise. Those in the informed condition were told that the work they do (cleaning hotel rooms) is good exercise and satisfies the Surgeon General's recommendations for an active lifestyle. Examples of how their work was exercise were provided. Subjects in the control group were not given this information. Although actual behavior did not change, 4 weeks after the intervention, the informed group perceived themselves to be getting significantly more exercise than before. As a result, compared with the control group, they showed a decrease in weight, blood pressure, body fat, waist-to-hip ratio, and body mass index. These results support the hypothesis that exercise affects health in part or in whole via the placebo effect.

Sephton SE, Salmon P, Weissbecker I, Ulmer C, Floyd A, Hoover A, Studts JL: Mindfulness meditation alleviates depressive symptoms in women with Fibromyalgia: Results of a randomized clinical trial. Arthritis Rheum (Arthritis Care Res) 2007;57:77–85.

Objective: Depressive symptoms are common among patients with fibromyalgia, and behavioral intervention has been recommended as a major treatment component for this illness. The objective of this study was to test the effects of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) intervention on depressive symptoms in patients with fibromyalgia.

Methods: This randomized controlled trial examined effects of the 8-week MBSR intervention on depressive symptoms in 91

women with fibromyalgia who were randomly assigned to treatment (n = 51) or a waiting-list control group (n = 40). Eligible patients were at least 18 years old, willing to participate in a weekly group, and able to provide physician verification of a fibromyalgia diagnosis. Of 166 eligible participants who responded to local television news publicizing, 49 did not appear for a scheduled intake, 24 enrolled but did not provide baseline data, and 2 were excluded due to severe mental illness, leaving 91 participants. The sample averaged 48 years of age and had 14.7 years of education. The typical participant was white, married, and employed. Patients randomly assigned to treatment received MBSR. Eight weekly 2.5-hour sessions were led by a licensed clinical psychologist with mindfulness training. Somatic and cognitive symptoms of depression were assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory administered at baseline, immediately postprogram, and at followup 2 months after the conclusion of the intervention.

Results: Change in depressive symptoms was assessed using slopes analyses of intervention effects over time. Depressive symptoms improved significantly in treatment versus control participants over the 3 assessments.

Conclusion: This meditation-based intervention alleviated depressive symptoms among patients with fibromyalgia.

Ng T-P, Chiam P-C, Lee T, Chua H-C, Lim L, Kua E-H: Curry consumption and cognitive function in the elderly. Am J Epidemiol 2006;164:898–906.

Curcumin, from the curry spice turmeric, has been shown to possess potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and to reduce b-amyloid and plaque burden in experimental studies, but epidemiologic evidence is lacking. The authors investigated the association between usual curry consumption level and cognitive function in elderly Asians. In a population-

based cohort (n = 1,010) of nondemented elderly Asian subjects aged 60–93 years in 2003, the authors compared Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) scores for three categories of regular curry consumption, taking into account known sociodemographic, health, and behavioral correlates of MMSE performance. Those who consumed curry ‘occasionally’ and ‘often or very often’ had significantly better MMSE scores than did subjects who ‘never or rarely’ consumed curry. The authors reported tentative evidence of better cognitive performance from curry consumption in nondemented elderly Asians, which should be confirmed in future studies.

Hyland ME, Whalley B, Geraghty AWA: Dispositional predictors of placebo responding: A motivational interpretation of flower essence and gratitude therapy. J Psychosom Res 2007;62:331–340.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to test a motivational interpretation of placebo responding using two different types of placebo therapy, one using flower essences and the other a nonspecific psychological therapy. The motivational concordance interpretation is that therapeutic rituals that are consistent with self-defining or self-actualizing goals have a nonspecific therapeutic benefit independently of expectancy.

Methods: Study 1 was a replication of an earlier flower essence outcome study but with additional outcome and predictor variables: 167 people completed questionnaires in return for free flower essence treatment. Predictor variables consisted of two measures of spirituality, optimism, expectancy, and attitudes and beliefs to complementary medicine. Outcome was assessed after 3 weeks. In Study 2, 90 people took part in ‘gratitude therapy’ for improved sleep quality over one night in return for questionnaire completion (trait gratitude, spirituality, and expectancy).

Results: Study 1 confirmed previous research: Trait spirituality predicted perceived improvement. This improvement was independent of optimism ($p < 0.001$), cannot be explained by acquiescence or social desirability, and was independent of a highly conservative test of expectancy ($p = 0.02$). In Study 2, trait gratitude predicted perceived sleep improvement independently of expectancy ($p = 0.01$): Spirituality did not correlate with improvement.

Conclusions: These data suggest that in addition to expectations, degree of engagement in a positive, therapeutic ritual determines the extent of the placebo response. The placebo response depends in part on the interaction (i.e., the degree of concordance) between the type of therapy and the participant’s personality: Dispositional predictors vary with the type of placebo therapy.

Linde K, Witt CM, Streng A, Weidenhammer W, Wagenpfeil S, Brinkhaus B, Willich S, Melchart D: The impact of patient expectations on outcomes in four randomized controlled trials of acupuncture in patients with chronic pain. Pain 2007;128:264–271.

In a pooled analysis of four randomized controlled trials of acupuncture in patients with migraine, tension-type headache, chronic low back pain, and osteoarthritis of the knee we investigated the influence of expectations on clinical outcome. The 864 patients included in the analysis received either 12 sessions of acupuncture or minimal (i.e. sham) acupuncture (superficial needling of nonacupuncture points) over an 8 week period. Patients were asked at baseline whether they considered acupuncture to be an effective therapy in general and what they personally expected from the treatment. After three acupuncture sessions patients were asked how confident they were that they would benefit from the treatment strategy they were receiving. Patients were classified as responders if the respective main outcome measure improved by at least fifty percent. Both univariate and multivariate analyses adjusted for potential confounders (such as condition, intervention group, age, sex, duration of complaints, etc.) consistently showed a significant influence of attitudes and expectations on outcome. After completion of treatment, the odds ratio for response between patients considering acupuncture an effective or highly effective therapy and patients who were more sceptical was 1.67 (95% confidence interval 1.20–2.32). For personal expectations and confidence after the third session, odds ratios were 2.03 (1.26–3.26) and 2.35 (1.68–3.30), respectively. Results from the 6-month follow-up were similar. In conclusion, in our trials a significant association was shown between better improvement and higher outcome expectations.