

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Through Meditation: A Review of Psychological and Cognitive Outcomes

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
Type: Article Received: 18 March 2026 Revised: 01 April 2026 Accepted: 18 May 2026 Published: 01 June 2026	This review discusses the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in reducing stress, anxiety, and other mental disorders among adults. 25 peer-reviewed articles published from 2000 to 2023 were studied by researchers. The studies involved a combination of patients such as students, working adults, and patients with some medical diseases. The most frequently used program was Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), typically 8 weeks. Wait-list controls or additional comparison groups were applied to cross-check the results. The effects were assessed using various instruments, such as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and physical parameters like cortisol level. The majority of the studies applied a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) design, whereas a few of them applied quasi-experimental or pilot designs. The findings decidedly prove that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) help in maintaining good mental health and achieving emotional balance. The current review places an emphasis on the growing need for mindfulness for public mental well-being. Keywords: Mindfulness, MBSR, Stress Reduction, Anxiety, Mental Health, Meditation, Randomized Controlled Trial, Systematic Review, Psychological Well-Being, Adult Interventions.

How to Cite This Article

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Introduction

Mindfulness is the art of giving your complete attention to the here and now, without judgment. It involves being conscious of your surroundings, feelings, and thoughts in the present, instead of getting caught up in the past or anxious about the future. It's about seeing and accepting things as they are, which can decrease stress and enhance well-being[8].

Stress is the sensation of being overworked or overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the demands. Stress occurs when you experience difficulty, pressure, or stressful situations causing you to be anxious or tense. Stress both physically and psychologically can lead you to worry, feel tired, or irritable. Too little stress is detrimental to health[28].

Meditation is a technique in which you concentrate your mind to gain a state of relaxation and lucidity. Meditation is sitting silently, breathing deeply, and discarding distractions. The purpose of meditation is to unwind, lessen stress, and improve your mental health. There are numerous kinds of meditation, but all help you become more aware of your thoughts and emotions[27].

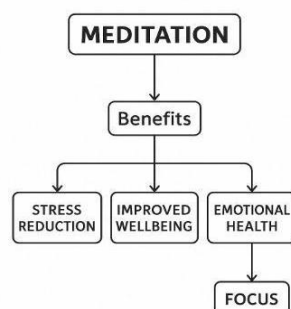


Fig 1.

Research Problem

In today's fast-paced and demanding society, In modern fast-paced lifestyles, stress has become a significant contributing factor to both physical and mental health issues. chronic stress has been linked to a variety of conditions, including anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, sleeplessness, and cognitive impairment. Although medication is available, it often has side effects and isn't always a practical long-term solution. This has prompted academics and clinicians to investigate alternate, non-pharmacological stress management treatments [11]. One such strategy that has drawn a lot of attention in the last 20 years is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which was first created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s. In order to develop present-moment awareness and encourage relaxation, MBSR integrates body awareness, yoga, and mindfulness meditation techniques. Patients with cancer, anxiety, hypertension, and chronic illnesses are among the many populations for which it is used clinically, in addition to students and healthy adults [2, 15].

Need for the study

Over the years, awareness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and contemplation practices have become increasingly prevalent in hospitals, seminaries, and even workplaces. As more people have started using these methods, researchers have studied their effects on internal and physical health — including changes in brain function, better focus, emotional balance, and improved thinking skills [15, 3]. Even though there's a lot of research out there, we still don't have a clear overall picture of how these methods actually work, who they help the most, or what kind of benefits we should be measuring. Many former reviews have only looked at specific issues or focused on certain groups of people, meaning we're still missing the full story [25, 16]. That's why this review brings together 25 recent and applicable studies to better understand how MBSR and meditation help reduce stress. These include a blend of clinical trials, brain studies, population-based research, and large-scale analyses. By comparing them, this review will highlight shared patterns — such as improvements in stress levels, emotional health, and cognitive abilities — while additionally identifying the gaps in current knowledge and suggesting directions for future research [6, 11].

Methodology

Participants

As we reviewed 25 papers for our SLR, this included papers that focused on different groups of adults, such as students, teachers, working professionals, cancer patients, postmenopausal women with PCOS, AISO individuals, and others. certain studies involved participants who had diseases such as stress, anxiety, sleep issues, or high blood pressure.

Intervention

In the papers reviewed, the participants were included in different types of mindfulness-based programs. These programs were used to help with stress, anxiety, or emotional problems. In this review, the common program mentioned was MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). MBSR includes activities like meditation, breathing exercises, and light yoga, all while focusing on the present

moment [24, 9]. Most of the programs lasted 8 weeks, with one session per week. Some programs were longer and included additional components like guided meditations or pranayama practice [16, 21]. These sessions were conducted mainly by trained teachers or health professionals. During selected sessions, participants were instructed to practice at home and communicate their personal insights to fellow participants [6].

Comparator (Control Group)

In the studies we looked at, the comparison groups consisted of people who were not taking part in the mindfulness exercises. In this type of study, comparators were used with a wait-list control group. This group consisted of people who were scheduled to receive the MBSR program after a particular period. Results from the interventions compared against this control group of people who were on a waiting list [25, 4]. Some of the studies included conducting other interventions than the MBSR techniques, like educational sessions by experts instead of MBSR training, and then compared the outcomes among participants who underwent the MBSR training [15, 24, 5]. Some studies also used participant self-assessments to analyse their performance before and after receiving MBSR training, examining whether their behavior changed after the intervention [6, 11]. All these techniques were utilized to determine whether reductions in stress and anxiety in participants was truly due to mindfulness-based interventions [3, 1].

Outcome measurement

This review utilized various approaches in evaluating the impact and effectiveness of mindfulness-based programs. Many of them used widely employed questionnaires, which were completed by participants prior to and after the program. For instance, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was widely applied to assess the level of stress, and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) was utilized to assess anxiety [15, 17]. Several studies utilized the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) instrument to evaluate participants' level of mindfulness skills [25, 4]. In a few of the studies, the researchers conducted inperson interviews in order to gather more information regarding the individuals' personal experiences [5, 11]. They also monitored physiological indicators of tension, such as cortisol, to check whether or not the body was reacting [24, 1]. This gave a better assessment of how the mindfulness-based treatments affected the mind and body through the use of these self-report ratings and correlating them with interviews and body measurements [9, 6].

Study Design

The mixed design research studies reviewed in this article were mostly Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs). These enabled researchers to compare MBSR interventions with control conditions under strict conditions. The trials proved the efficacy of MBSR on outcomes like stress, anxiety, and sleep [15, 17, 13]. Other research applied pilot or quasi-experimental methods in which patients were given the intervention but not randomized. They were applied mostly to special population research such as postmenopausal women, students, or school teachers [25, 16, 10]. They might lack the same control as RCTs but continued to yield useful information about mindfulness functioning in public settings [20, 6]. In addition to primary research, this review also included a few systematic reviews and metaanalyses. These studies combined and analyzed results from multiple papers, offering a broader perspective on the overall effectiveness of mindfulness-based programs across different contexts [9, 4].

Language

All the studies considered were English publications, and this made the information available, uniform, and simple to understand for the research team. This also assisted in ensuring a uniform method while conducting the analysis [2, 15, 25].

Publication Timeline

Reviews between 2000 and 2023 were eligible for inclusion in the review for this purpose. These years were employed in order to include early original reports on MBSR, in addition to the more recent research. A selection of the earlier influential review papers on mindfulness has been included within the review, together with a selection of the more recent trials, including more contemporary applications to a range of groups and pathologies [24, 9, 4].

Article Type

Only peer-reviewed, full-text journal articles were utilized in this review. This guaranteed that all the studies had been academically reviewed, scientifically rigorous, and descriptive enough to allow meaningful comparison and thematic analysis.

Data Tables

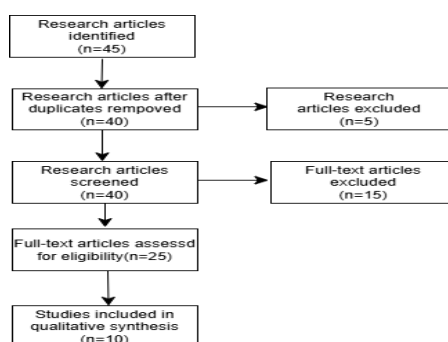


Fig 2.

Result

A total of 45 research articles were first identified from database searches. 40 articles were left after eliminating duplicates and were screened on titles and abstracts. Of these, 25 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility. 15 articles were excluded after the predefined selection criteria were implemented to filter relevant studies. Finally, 10 studies were part of qualitative synthesis. These studies were employed to compile 10 data tables, highlighting most important themes including mindfulness, reduction of stress, practices related to meditation, and their psychological and physiological effect

Authors	Objective	Data Set	Preprocessing	Approach Used	Compared With	Evaluation Matric
Sala Horowitz, PhD	To review recent research on meditation's efficacy for stress reduction, health improvements, and overall wellness.	Clinical studies, meta-analyses, and observational research on various meditation techniques and applications.	Studies grouped by meditation type (e.g., Transcendental Meditation, Mindfulness) and treated conditions (e.g., hypertension, cancer).	Highlights outcomes such as reduced blood pressure, improved QoL, and stress reduction.	Compared meditation outcomes with standard healtheducati on programs and relaxation techniques.	Effectiveness measured through changes in blood pressure, stress levels, quality of life, and emotional well-being. [20]
Aleezé S. Moss et al. (2012)	Investigate effects of an 8week meditation program on mood and anxiety in patients with memory loss.	15 subjects with memory problems, aged 62 ± 7 years, participating in 8-week meditation training.	Neuropsychological tests, mood scales, and SPECT imaging for CBF analysis.	Kirtan Kriya meditation practiced for 12 minutes daily over 8 weeks.	Control group listening to Mozart violin concertos.	Improvements in mood and anxiety correlated with CBF changes, analyzed via neuroimaging and statistical tests. [17]
Xiaoqian Ding et al. (2014)	Explore how short-term meditation impacts creativity and mood.	40 undergraduates assigned to meditation (IBMT) and relaxation training groups	PANAS for mood assessment; TTCT for creativity evaluation.	30 minutes/day of IBMT or relaxation for 7 days.	Relaxation training (progressive muscle relaxation).	Improved creativity (TTCT scores) and better emotional regulation (cross-lagged analysis).[16]
Julia Basso et al. (2018)	Study effects of short meditation (13 mins/day) on cognitive and emotional regulation.	76 adults (nonexperienced meditators) randomized into meditation and podcast control groups.	Neuropsychological and mood tests, cortisol level measurement pre- and post-training.	13-minute guided meditation over 8 weeks with evaluation at 4-week and 8-week intervals.	Listening to podcasts for 13 minutes/day as control.	Enhanced mood, memory, and attention after 8 weeks; reduced cortisol and stress test scores.[9]
Zahra Salajegheh et al. (2023)	Assess the effect of MBSR on worries of women with PCOS.	60 women with PCOS, randomized into intervention (MBSR) and control groups.	Questionnaire with 34 questions divided into six domains; validated by experts.	Eight 90minute sessions of MBSR over 8 weeks.	Routine care without mindfulness intervention.	Reduction in total worry scores and six domain scores over 8 weeks, verified by ANCOVA.[1]

Anh An et al. (2022)	Investigate MBSR's effect on stress levels and brain activity in college students.	EEG data and psychological metrics (PSS, DASS-42) from 40 college students.	EEG signal preprocessing and psychological assessments pre- and post-MBSR.	8-week standardized MBSR sessions with stressinduction cognitive tasks.	Students without mindfulness intervention.	Increased frontal alpha power on EEG and reduced PSS and DASS-42 scores by ~33% and ~40%, respectively.[3]
Stefan G. Hofmann et al. (2010)	Evaluate MindfulnessBased Therapy (MBT) for anxiety and depression.	Multiple RCTs focusing on MBT interventions for stress-related disorders.	Included studies met strict eligibility criteria for RCTs with validated outcomes.	Meta-analysis of therapy outcomes across diverse studies.	Traditional therapy methods like CBT and noninterventi onal groups.	Decrease in symptoms related to anxiety and depression through standardized scales (e.g., DASS-42).[22]
Maryanna D. Klatt, Janet Buckworth, William B. Malarkey	To evaluate the effects of a shortened MBSR program on stress, mindfulness, and sleep quality	Data collected from 48 working adults at a university worksite	Randomization of participants into intervention and control groups; weekly and daily tracking	Abbreviated MBSR program (1hour weekly sessions, 20minute daily meditations)	Intervention group (MBSR-ld) vs. control group	Perceived Stress Scale, Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index.[23]
J.C. Basso et al.	Assess effects of brief daily meditation on mood, cognition, and stress response over 8 weeks.	76 participants (nonmeditators) randomized into meditation and podcast groups.	Salivary cortisol tests, Stroop Tasks, and self-reported mood questionnaires pre/post.	13-minute guided meditation sessions for 8 weeks.	Podcast listening as control intervention.	Enhanced mood, memory, and reduced stress markers like cortisol.[15]
Nerea Jiménez-Picón, Macarena Romero-Martín, José Antonio PonceBland ón, Lucia Ramirez-Baena	To review the relationship between mindfulness and emotional intelligence among healthcare workers	Systematic review analyzing data from 10 studies across various healthcare settings	Selection of peerreviewed articles using PRISMA guidelines; removal of duplicates and irrelevant data	Review of mindfulness interventions and their correlation with emotional intelligence metrics	Studies with mindfulness training vs. studies without mindfulness intervention	Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, and related measures.[7]

Findings & Analysis through emerging themes

After going through 25 research papers on mindfulness and meditation, some clear patterns started to emerge. Despite being undertaken across diverse contexts and participant groups, the studies demonstrated consistent findings. To make the review easier to understand, we've divided the results into four broad themes: stress and anxiety relief, brain and emotional changes, group-specific effects, and the difference between short and long-term practice.

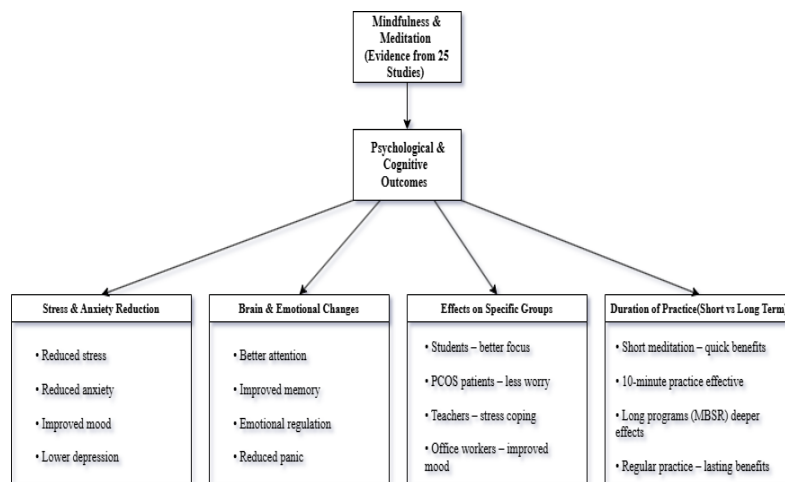


Fig 3.

Effect on Stress and Anxiety

Most studies we examined revealed substantial reductions in stress or anxiety after mindfulness or meditation programs. For example, Hofmann et al. (2010) [17] and Khoury et al. (2015) [20] reviewed mindfulness-based therapy, which was shown to reduce anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms in participants. Similarly, evidence was reported in students (e.g., Klatt et al. [5]) and across clinical populations of women diagnosed with PCOS, and cancer patients (Carlson et al. [16]).

Participants in studies reported improved quality of mood and reduction in stress-related symptoms, even when the mindful intervention was delivered at a low dose and/or shorter duration. This indicates that even a small amount of meditation can lead to clear mental health improvements if practiced regularly.

Changes in the Brain and Emotions

In addition, there has been a significant amount of research in the area of the brain and emotions, and the use of mindfulness/meditation-related practice. A few (Gotink et al. [12] | Bokk et al. [26]) even used brain imaging to see what is actually happening in the brain when someone practices meditation on a more regular basis. The practice of mindfulness produced actual changes in the area of the brain responsible for attention, memory, and emotion regulation, and had an overall positive effect on how people viewed their mental health. Research in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) with participants also showed improvement in attention regulation and decreased feelings of panic when under pressure. Even shorter programs like the 8-week MBSR produced actual changes in the brain, and were equal to studies of others who had practiced other meditation styles for many years. In conclusion, there appears to be enough of a change in the brain from a practice of mindfulness (or meditation), even when one is a newcomer. (Salajegheh et al. [1]).

Effects on Specific Groups

The response to mindfulness differed slightly for different groups but was a positive effect across the board. For instance, students utilizing mindfulness offered a report of improved focus and reduced academic stress (Klatt et al. [16]). While postmenopausal women saw better sleep quality (Carlson et al. [21]), those dealing with PCOS mentioned they felt much less worried (Salajegheh et al. [1]). Teachers that did pranayama (or breath work) also reported that it assisted them in coping with their everyday stress better (Basso et al. [6]). Individuals with memory problems and general office workers experienced similar positive impacts, which included improved mood and emotional regulation (Moss et al. [11]). This demonstrates that despite variations among groups, mindfulness provides a broader objective of decreasing a cognitive tax.

Short-Term vs Long-Term Practice

Comparing short-term to long-term mindfulness, the results were fairly balanced. Even a brief daily meditation, just 10 minutes, produced rapid mood, attentional, and creativity enhancements (Basso et al. [6]). More formal and long-term programs, such as the 8-week MBSR program, produced deeper and more lasting benefits (Gotink et al. [12], Hofmann et al. [17]). Individuals in long-term programs indicated not only improved mood but also healthier lifestyle, improved emotional regulation, and clearer mind in general. Therefore, although short practices are beneficial for immediate relief, regular and longer routines appear to provide more significant change in the long run (Basso et al. [6], Klatt et al. [16]).

Discussion

Main Trends and Findings

The research literature here does clearly show the effectiveness of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) approach in alleviating stress and anxiety. Whether it is school students coping with school stress or business executives coping with work stress, MBSR seems to be an immensely effective method of reducing psychological burden. To give an example, research performing the

mindfulness interventions. by Hofmann et al. [22] and Carlson et al. [5] show considerable improvement in emotional well-being after MBSR.

the benefits are not limited to

a single group of individuals. certain studies have also examined specific populations, such as university students, older adults, and women dealing with hormonal issues [12]. MBSR across different demographic groups [6]. These studies indicate that MBSR is adaptable and can suit individuals with different needs and lifestyles. Additional studies show that this program can actually lead to physical changes in the brain. For example, Gotink et al. [14] found that mindfulness can have the power to enhance the regions of the brain related to concentration and emotional processing. Even brief, daily meditations like those mentioned in Basso et al. (2018) [9] can improve memory, mood, and attention even in novice meditators.

Areas for Further Research

Most existing studies on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) mainly focus on its short-term outcomes. Therefore, further research is required to examine whether the benefits persist beyond program completion and the sustainability of these effects over time [2].

There is limited research comparing MBSR with alternative treatment approaches like cognitive-behavioral therapy or medication, which makes it difficult to evaluate its relative effectiveness [3].

Many studies differ significantly in their research design and program structure. Some involve large, well-structured programs, while others are smaller or less formal. This variation makes it challenging to draw clear and generalized conclusions.

We still don't have enough research on specific groups, such as men, teenagers, and people from various ethnic backgrounds. As a result, more research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of MBSR across different demographic groups [6].

There is a need for future research to assess MBSR over longer time periods in order to better understand the long-term sustainability of its benefits [9].

Upcoming studies should involve a more diverse range of participants to ensure the findings are relevant to a wider population [23]. More research is required to see how the length and specific style of the practice affects the final results. For instance, comparing the effects of a daily short session with a longer weekly session may provide valuable insights.

The use of advanced brain imaging technologies such as fMRI has the potential to enhance comprehension among researchers regarding how mindfulness practices influence brain function [14].

As digital tools continue to improve, upcoming studies ought to look at how mobile apps and online platforms stack up against traditional face-to-face classes. Further investigation is needed to understand the impact of different durations or types of mindfulness practice. Further investigation is needed to understand the impact of different durations or types of mindfulness practice.

Conclusion

Evidence from this review suggests that mindfulness interventions, including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), reduce stress and anxiety in various groups of adults. Positive results were observed across all groups and participants reported being more skilled at regulating their emotions, were less stressed, and had improved mindfulness skills. Randomized controlled trials yielded strong evidence that the interventions were effective, but pilot studies and quasi-experimental studies also yielded good outcomes, particularly in schools and clinics. The findings were more reliable as they included physical measures and self-report questionnaires. There were minor differences in the way the studies were done and the length, but overall consistency of findings indicates that mindfulness practice is an elementary and non-pharmacological means of improving mental health. Future research can examine more closely the long-term impact of the practices and how to translate them to more general public health interventions.

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