

LETTERS TO EDITOR

YOGA: BETTER TREATMENT OR BETTER PLACEBO?

Sir,

Raina et al (2001) randomized alcoholic patients to yoga (n=25) or physical exercise (n=25) and found that those who practised yoga showed higher improvement and recovery rates at 8 (but not 24) weeks than those who only exercised. Raina et al concluded that the better gains in the yoga group were intrinsic to yoga therapy.

I suggest that an alternate explanation is possible. Raina et al described that patients who practised yoga were taught the principles of the process, including the need for awareness, while those who only exercised received no specific instructions. As a result, expectations may have been raised to a greater extent in the yoga group. This, in turn, may have enhanced the placebo response to yoga. In effect, yoga may have been a better placebo, and not a better treatment.

Future randomized controlled trials on yoga should assess attitudes and expectations from therapy in both yoga and control groups. This is important because, in a country such as India, expectations from yoga may anyway be high, the instructions of the investigators notwithstanding. If this is found to be the case, randomization to treatments should be stratified on the basis of attitudes, and expectations in the control group must be comparably elevated through appropriate instruction.

REFERENCE

Raina, N., Chakraborty, P.K., Basit, M.A., Samarth, S.N. & Singh, H. (2001) Evaluation of yoga therapy in alcohol dependence. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 43, 171-174.

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