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Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: Potential for psychological interventions

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Abstract

Mindfulness-based meditation interventions have become increasingly popular in contemporary psychology. Other closely related meditation practices include loving-kindness meditation (LKM) and compassion meditation (CM), exercises oriented toward enhancing unconditional, positive emotional states of kindness and compassion. This article provides a review of the background, the techniques, and the empirical contemporary literature of LKM and CM. The literature suggests that LKM and CM are associated with an increase in positive affect and a decrease in negative affect. Preliminary findings from neuroendocrine studies indicate that CM may reduce stress-induced subjective distress and immune response. Neuroimaging studies suggest that LKM and CM may enhance activation of brain areas that are involved in emotional processing and empathy. Finally, preliminary intervention studies support application of these strategies in clinical populations. It is concluded that, when combined with

empirically supported treatments, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, LKM and CM may provide potentially useful strategies for targeting a variety of different psychological problems that involve interpersonal processes, such as depression, social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and coping with the strains of long-term caregiving.

Highlights

° We review the literature on loving-kindness and compassion meditation. ° Neuroendocrine studies suggest that compassion meditation reduces subjective distress and immune response to stress. ° Neuroimaging studies suggest that both meditation practices enhance activation of emotion centers of the brain. ° Preliminary intervention studies support the application of these strategies in clinical populations. ° We conclude that these techniques are effective for treating social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and strains of long-term caregiving.



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Keywords

Loving-kindness meditation; Mindfulness; Compassion meditation; Anger; Anxiety; Depression

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