



## RT Wise Owls

Recreational Therapy Evidence Based Practice:  
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### Student Research

# The Use of Yoga, Meditation, Mantram, and Mindfulness to Enhance Coping in Veterans with PTSD

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**Search Terms:** PTSD AND Veterans AND Recreation; Meditation AND Veterans AND Recreation; Yoga AND Stress AND Recreation OR Mindfulness AND Service Member; Meditation AND yoga AND Veterans with PTSD. Mindfulness AND Veterans AND Stress.

**Years:** 2003–2013

**Databases:** Academic Search Premier, CINAHL, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus

**Number of Articles Reviewed:** 6

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## Summary of Research Findings

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is commonly diagnosed in veterans and can include a variety of debilitating symptoms including depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, anger, nightmares, flashbacks, and chronic pain. These symptoms can negatively impact many aspects of an individual's life and frequently result in decreased coping and overall quality of life. Recently, interventions using yoga, meditation, mantram, and mindfulness have been explored as avenues for improving symptoms of PTSD in this population.

This review of the literature included six articles that summarized research studies using diverse research designs. Five of the studies used veterans as participants, while one study utilized military personnel on active duty (Stoller, Gruel, Cimini, Fowler, & Koomar, 2012). Participants in all studies were primarily male and had military related symptoms of PTSD that affected their everyday lives.

Interventions included yoga (Staples, Hamilton, & Uddo, 2013; Stoller et al., 2012), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (King et al., 2013), meditation (Rosenthal, Grosswald, Ross & Rosenthal, 2011), mantram (Borman, Liu, Thorp & Lang, 2012), and a combination of mindfulness, meditation, and yoga (Kearney, McDermott, Malte, Martinez, & Simpson, 2012). Interventions were provided for a duration of three weeks (Stoller et al., 2012), six weeks (Bormann et al., 2012; Staples et al., 2013), eight weeks (Kearney et al., 2012; King et al., 2013), or 12 weeks (Rosenthal et al., 2011).

Results indicated a statistically significant reduction of stress and anxiety (Stoller et al., 2012), daytime dysfunction and hyperarousal (Staples et al., 2013), depression (Kearney et al., 2012),

negative cognitions (King et al., 2013) and symptoms of PTSD (Bormann et al., 2012; King et al., 2013; Rosenthal et al., 2011). Additionally, veterans who received the interventions experienced improvements in quality of sleep (Rosenthal et al., 2011), mindfulness (Kearney et al., 2012), spiritual well-being (Borman et al., 2012), acceptance (Kearney et al., 2012), social functioning (Rosenthal et al., 2011) and overall quality of life (Kearney et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2011; Stoller et al., 2012).

Although some studies were limited by a small sample size (King et al., 2013; Rosenthal et al., 2011; Staples et al., 2013) or lack of control group (Kearney et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2011; Staples et al., 2013), overall these six studies yielded important and significant evidence to support the use of yoga, meditation, mantram and mindfulness activities to improve coping in veterans with PTSD symptoms.

## Knowledge Translation Plan

Although the lives of service members can be negatively impacted in many ways by posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRSs) have a unique opportunity to positively impact the lives of veterans by introducing individuals to interventions based on yoga, meditation, mantram, and mindfulness as a way of reducing PTSD symptoms.

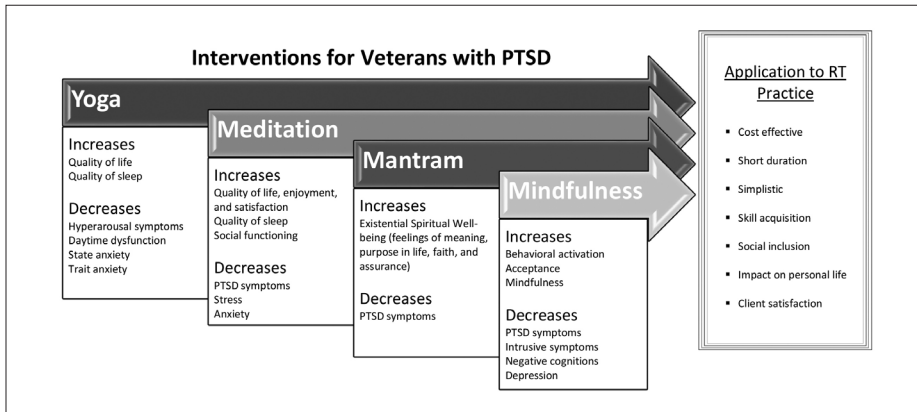
There are several unique advantages to using yoga, meditation, mantram, and mindfulness in recreation therapy (RT) practice. One advantage is that these interventions are generally inexpensive, which makes them an economical option for a variety of programs. The degree of difficulty for these activities is low, and practitioners can use resources such as

the Internet and instructional videos to learn basic techniques. Additionally, since PTSD is a psychological condition, unless clients are also presenting with physical impairments, adaptive techniques should not be necessary.

Skill acquisition can occur very quickly for clients, and these interventions are easily incorporated into the daily lives of veterans. Benefits have been recorded in a relatively short period of time, making yoga, meditation, mantram and mindfulness in situations where a CTRS may only see clients for a short period of time. Acquiring skills and achieving goals quickly should also motivate clients to continue the use of these activities in their daily routine, even after RT sessions may have ended.

All of these activities can be done alone or in group settings, but yoga is the activity most commonly delivered in a group format. For veterans, group yoga sessions can promote social inclusion that may even extend beyond the session. This shared social experience could have a major impact on the lives of veterans and their ability to cope.

Since the literature indicates that yoga/meditation/mantram/mindfulness interventions have not only reduced symptoms, but also have resulted in enhanced relationships with family, friends and co-workers, recreation therapists may want to consider including family members in treatment sessions as well. Finally, since veterans with PTSD have indicated they enjoy these interventions, high levels of interest, motivation and adherence can be expected.



**Figure 1.** Interventions for Veterans with PTSD

**References**

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