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## Original Article

# Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in the intervention of psychiatric disorders: A review

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## ABSTRACT

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is frequently used for psychiatric disorders. Despite MBCT's considerable potential for improving psychological health for patients, there is little empirical evidence to support its practical application in Chinese. This review will define meditation and mindfulness, provide an overview of the development of MBCT, identify the evidence for the effectiveness of MBCT, and offer recommendations to medical personnels on how to provide support for patients receiving mindfulness intervention.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, practices and interventions involving mindfulness have become increasingly popular as complementary mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) for a variety of mental and physical illness [1]. In particular, mindfulness based stress

reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) have been studied as clinical interventions and have a strong evidence base documenting their effectiveness [2,3]. Combining elements of MBSR with approaches from cognitive psychology and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) led to the development of MBCT, initially presented as Attentional Control Training, and primarily focused on treating psychiatric

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disorders [4]. This review will define meditation and mindfulness, provide an overview of the development of MBCT, identify the evidence for the effectiveness of MBCT, and offer recommendations to medical personnels on how to provide support for patients receiving mindfulness intervention.

## 2. Defining meditation, mindfulness

MBCT is derived from the ancient Buddhist and Yoga philosophies by utilizing meditation and mindfulness.

### 2.1. Meditation

Meditation is defined as the intentional self-regulation of attention from moment to moment [5]. It is an intentional and self-regulated focusing of attention for the purpose of relaxing and calming the mind and body. In Latin: “meditari” is to think, to dwell upon, or to exercise the mind, and “mederi” is to heal. The Sanskrit derivation is “medha,” which means “wisdom”. Physical and psychological health changes such as increased cerebral blood flow, reductions in metabolic activity, heart and respiratory rates, blood pressure, oxygen consumption, and muscle tension, decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety, have been empirically linked to the practice of meditation [6,7]. Although there are various styles of meditation, including Chakra yoga, Rinzai Zen, Mudra yoga, Sufism, Yoto Zen, and Buddhist insight meditation, two of the more commonly discussed forms of meditation are transcendental meditation (TM) and particularly mindfulness meditation (MM) have been found to be beneficial. During meditation periods, known as Zazen, practitioners sit silently without moving on either a cushion or in a chair [8].

### 2.2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is style of meditative practice. However, mindfulness more generally means a mental state whereby nonjudgmental awareness is specifically focused on one’s moment-by-moment experience [9]. Marlatt and Kristeller defined mindfulness as “bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.” [10] Mark Williams et al. wrote that mindfulness is “the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally, to things as they are [11]. Mindfulness meditation can be thought of as a framework used to develop the state of mindfulness [12]. During mindfulness meditation, attention is specifically focused on the internal cognitive and emotional workings of the mind [13]. During mindfulness one becomes an observer of one’s own stream of consciousness.

## 3. Developing MBCT

MBSR and MBCT are secular, clinically based group therapy methods using manuals and standardized techniques. MBSR includes education about stress as well as training on coping strategies and assertiveness. The mindfulness component includes sitting meditation, a body scan—a reflective assessment of one’s own body state, and Hatha Yoga [14]. MBSR

involves the cultivation of several attitudes, including becoming an impartial witness to one’s own experience and acceptance of things as they actually are in the present moment [14]. MBCT is based on MBSR and combines the principles and practice of cognitive therapy with those of mindfulness framework [4]. It has been developed with the aim of reducing relapse in persons with recurrent depression and anxiety, and those vulnerable to episodes of depression and anxiety. Based on the work of Jon Kabat Zinn, MBCT includes simple breathing meditations and yoga stretches to aid individuals in becoming more aware of the present moment, including getting in touch with moment to moment changes in the mind and body. MBCT also includes psycho education on depression and anxiety and a number of exercises from cognitive therapy that demonstrate the association between thinking patterns/styles, feelings and behavior, and ways individuals can look after themselves when they feel overwhelmed by low mood or anxious thoughts [15].

## 4. Practice and evidence

### 4.1. Brief review of practice

Meditation is a traditional Buddhist approach to mindfulness [8], while, in contrast, MBSR and MBCT are secular, clinically based group therapy methods that utilize manuals and standardized techniques [14]. However, it is important to note that meditation can be practiced as a secular means to achieve mindfulness [16]. MBCT is an 8-session course delivered to groups of participants, selection of cognitive therapy elements is based on understanding that at times of lowered mood, people who have experienced multiple depressive episodes undergo reactivation of ‘modes’ of being in which thoughts, emotions and bodily reactions interact [17]. The MBCT program specifically teaches recognition of deteriorating mood with the aim of disengaging from self-perpetuating patterns of ruminative, negative thoughts that contribute to relapse [18]. It is specifically designed to bring mindfulness into our everyday lives, particularly at the tipping points when our

**Table 1 – haracteristics of the practices of Meditation, MBSR and MBCT.**

Characteristics	Meditation	MBSR	MBCT
Sitting meditation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Group therapy format	It occurs in a group format, but not considered “group therapy”	Yes	Yes
Body scan	No	Yes	Yes
Hatha yoga	No	Yes	Yes
Cognitive therapy	No	No	Yes
Duration of intervention	Unlimited	Limited, often provided as an 8-session intervention.	Limited, often provided as an 8-session intervention.

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