

DOSING: HOW MUCH MINDFULNESS INTERVENTION IS NEEDED FOR BENEFITS? One of the most common questions posed by individuals contemplating whether they should enroll in a mindfulness intervention concerns the amount of mindfulness intervention necessary to experience benefits. The current evidence base suggests that even brief mindfulness interventions (e.g., 5–10-min guided mindfulness inductions, 3–4-session mindfulness meditation training) can buffer affective reactivity (e.g., negative affect, craving, pain) and reduce impulsive behaviors immediately following training (Broderick 2005, Papiés et al. 2015, Westbrook et al. 2013, Zeidan et al. 2011), although a recent meta-analysis suggests that these brief training effects are small in magnitude ($g = 0.21$) (M. Schumer, E.K. Lindsay, and J.D. Creswell, unpublished manuscript). In contrast, larger doses of mindfulness interventions, such as the 8-week MBSR program, produce moderate-to-large overall effects pre-post training (Baer 2003, Goyal et al. 2014). One illustrative study measured anxiety symptomatology in anxiety disorder patients weekly before, during, and after an MBSR intervention and showed relatively linear declines in anxiety symptoms over the course of the intervention, which were maintained at follow-up (see Figure 2)—suggesting a potential dose–response relationship in interventions, with greater doses of mindfulness intervention producing larger scalable effects over the 8-week intervention. However, few published RCTs have tested for mindfulness intervention dose–response relationships (either by experimentally manipulating the intervention dose or by relating measures of class attendance and home mindfulness practice duration with outcomes), which is an area that is in need of more research (see Carmody & Baer 2009). Different mindfulness intervention teachers recommend a wide range of daily doses of formal mindfulness practice, from 10 min to 1 h or more per day. There is no one-size-fits-all recommendation for how one should dose one’s mindfulness intervention training programs. Dosing of mindfulness interventions might follow the same general rules of thumb as dosing aerobic exercise interventions. Larger doses are likely to produce larger effects, the periodicity of the dose is probably important (with regular daily home practice producing larger effects), and there is an upper-bound dose of formal mindfulness intervention that is probably not helpful to participants new to mindfulness practices. Finally, although dosing is important, it is more important for participants to learn how to apply formal

mindfulness training skills to stressful or appetitive daily life experiences so that mindfulness skill development can translate into more effective coping.

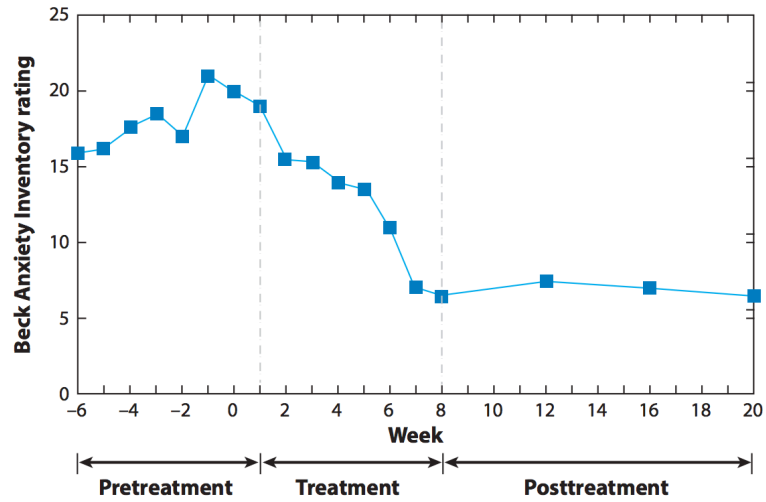


Figure 2

Mean Beck Anxiety Inventory ratings of patients before, during, and after treatment in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program. Figure created using data from Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992).