

# The Efficacy of Mindfulness in Reducing Anxiety

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## Introduction

- 1 in 5 adults will experience an anxiety disorder each year (Munir et al., 2019).
- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is one example of an anxiety disorder that is particularly debilitating. Studies have shown that over 30% of people with GAD have a decrease in work productivity of 10% or more (National Collaborating Center for Mental Health, 2011).
- The cost from preventable medical spending on anxiety disorders is estimated to be \$23 billion annually (Kessler and Greenberg, 2002).
- There is a clear need to find efficacious treatment for anxiety disorders and methods to reduce anxiety symptoms.

## PICOT Question

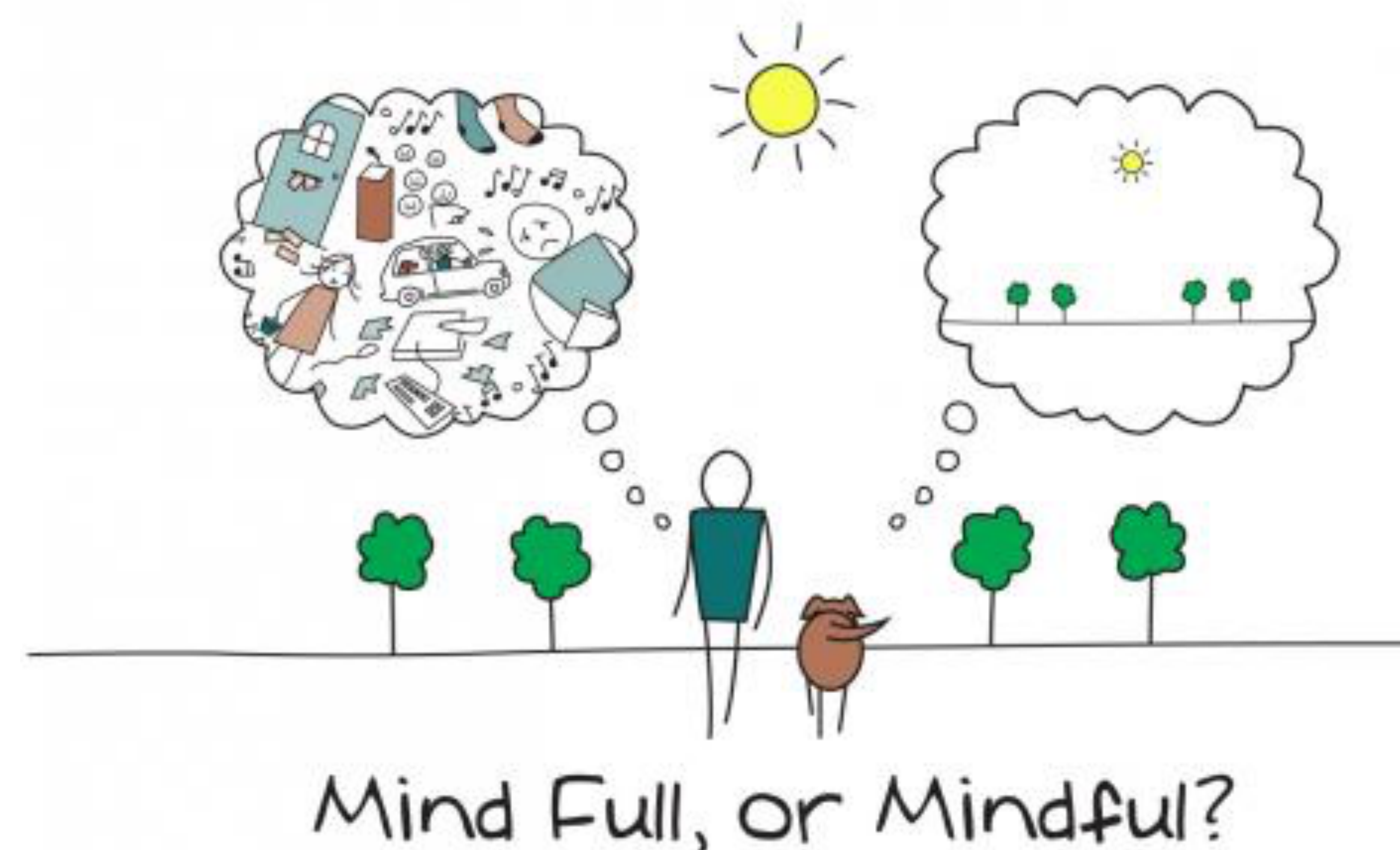
**In patients with generalized anxiety disorder (P), how does adding a mindfulness practice (I) compared to traditional pharmacological and CBT interventions (C) reduce patients' anxiety symptoms (O)?**

## Search Strategies

- Database searches for relevant articles was conducted using PubMed, Google Scholar, PsychInfo, CINAHL and UpToDate.
- Relevant articles evaluated mindfulness and its effect on generalized anxiety and may have additionally included a comparison against traditional pharmacological methods for anxiety management.
- 40 articles that fit the criteria were found. 10 articles with the highest level of evidence were selected for analysis and synthesis.

## Results

Study	Level	Key Findings
The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression (Hofmann et al., 2009)	I	Mindfulness-based therapy improves symptoms of anxiety and depression across a relatively wide range of severity
Mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions for anxiety disorders (Vøllestad et al., 2012)	I	Mindfulness and acceptance are effective in reducing distress associated with anxiety disorders
Mindfulness-based therapy (Khoury et al., 2013)	I	Mindfulness-based therapy is an effective treatment for a variety of psychological problems, it is especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress
Effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy as an adjuvant to pharmacotherapy in patients with panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder (Kim et al., 2009)	I	Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy may be effective at relieving anxiety and depressive symptoms in patients with panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder
Mindfulness-based stress reduction for patients with anxiety disorders: Evaluation in a randomized controlled trial (Vøllestad et al., 2013)	I	Mindfulness training has sustained beneficial effects on anxiety disorders and related symptomatology compared to a waiting-list control condition
The effect of mindfulness meditation training on biological acute stress responses in generalized anxiety disorder (Hoge et al., 2017)	I	Mindfulness meditation training is a relatively inexpensive and low-stigma treatment approach and may be a helpful strategy to decrease biological stress reactivity and improve resilience to stressors in patients with GAD



## What is Mindfulness?

- "Moment-to-moment, non-judgemental awareness"
- In 1979, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was coined at Massachusetts Medical Center as an intervention to reduce stress and relieve suffering (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).
- MBSR is an 8-week curriculum that incorporates yoga, breathing and awareness.
  1. Simple Awareness
  2. Attention & The Brain
  3. Dealing with Thoughts
  4. Stress: Responding vs Reacting
  5. Dealing with Difficult Emotions or Physical Pain
  6. Mindfulness and Communication
  7. Mindfulness and Compassion
  8. Conclusion: Develop your own practice

## Conclusion

Even though mindfulness-based training is not significant compared to traditional treatments alone, studies show that there are signs of improvement in anxiety and depression scales. Possible mechanisms of mindfulness could be resilience training. Further studies are needed to assess the efficacy of MBT/MBSR alone. Until further research and evidence is compiled, currently the best treatment for GAD has been a combination of pharmacological, CBT and MBT/MBSR treatment. Some of the limitations to current studies are the small sample size, lack of control groups, and difficulty with patients adhering to the interventions. Further research is needed to hone in on the effects of mindful based therapy specifically, the current research is severely lacking.

## Recommendation

- Although not significant as a stand-alone treatment, mindfulness-based therapy could be used as adjunct therapy to developing additional coping skills for patients during exacerbations of their anxiety.
- MBT can be used as an additional tool if patients have limitations to transportation, as it can be accessible virtually. This could alleviate the costs of CBT with regards to insurance, as many times insurance will only cover a limited amount of visits.