Comparing Yoga, Exercise, and a Self-Care Book for Chronic Low Back Pain: A Randomized, Controlled Trial

Abstract

**Background:** Chronic low back pain is a common problem that has only modestly effective treatment options.

**Objective:** To determine whether yoga is more effective than conventional therapeutic exercise or a self-care book for patients with chronic low back pain.

**Design:** Randomized, controlled trial.

**Setting:** A nonprofit, integrated health care system.

**Patients:** 101 adults with chronic low back pain.

**Intervention:** 12-week sessions of yoga or conventional therapeutic exercise classes or a self-care book.

**Measurements:** Primary outcomes were back-related functional status (modified 24-point Roland Disability Scale) and “bothersomeness” of pain (11-point numerical scale). The primary time point was 12 weeks. Clinically significant change was considered to be 2.5 points on the functional status scale and 1.5 points on the bothersomeness scale. Secondary outcomes were days of restricted activity, general health status, and medication use.

**Results:** After adjustment for baseline values, back-related function in the yoga group was superior to the book and exercise groups at 12 weeks (yoga vs. book: mean difference, −3.4 [95% CI, −5.1 to −1.6] [P < 0.001]; yoga vs. exercise: mean difference, −1.8 [CI, −3.5 to −0.1] [P = 0.034]). No significant differences in symptom bothersomeness were found between any 2 groups at 12 weeks; at 26 weeks, the yoga group was superior to the book group with respect to this measure (mean difference, −2.2 [CI, −3.2 to −1.2]; P < 0.001). At 26 weeks, back-related function in the yoga group was superior to the book group (mean difference, −3.6 [CI, −5.4 to −1.8]; P < 0.001).

**Limitations:** Participants in this study were followed for only 26 weeks after randomization. Only 1 instructor delivered each intervention.

**Conclusions:** Yoga was more effective than a self-care book for improving function and reducing chronic low back pain, and the benefits persisted for at least several months.
Yoga classes were found to be more effective than a self-care book for patients with chronic low back pain at reducing symptoms and improving function, but they were not more effective than stretching classes, according to a study published Online First by the Archives of Internal Medicine. A Randomized Trial Comparing Yoga, Stretching, and a Self-care Book for Chronic Low Back Pain. Archives of Internal Medicine, 2011; DOI: 10.1001/archinternmed.2011.524. Timothy S. Carey.