Meditation or Medication? Mindfulness training versus medication in the treatment of childhood ADHD: a randomized controlled trial.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Attention-Deficit-Hyperactivity-Disorder (ADHD) is, with a prevalence of 5%, a highly common childhood disorder, and has severe impact on the lives of youngsters and their families. Medication is often the treatment of choice, as it currently is most effective. However, medication has only short-term effects, treatment adherence is often low and most importantly; medication has serious side effects. Therefore, there is a need for other interventions for youngsters with ADHD. Mindfulness training is emerging as a potentially effective training for children and adolescents with ADHD. The aim of this study is to compare the (cost) effectiveness of mindfulness training to the (cost) effectiveness of methylphenidate in children with ADHD on measures of attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity.

METHODS/DESIGN:
A multicenter randomized controlled trial with 2 follow-up measurements will be used to measure the effects of mindfulness training versus the effects of methylphenidate. Participants will be youngsters (aged 9 to 18) of both sexes diagnosed with ADHD, referred to urban and rural mental healthcare centers. We aim to include 120 families. The mindfulness training, using the MYmind protocol, will be conducted in small groups, and consists of 8 weekly 1.5-h sessions. Youngsters learn to focus and enhance their attention, awareness, and self-control by doing mindfulness exercises. Parents will follow a parallel mindful parenting training in which they learn to be fully present in the here and now with their child in a non-judgmental way, to take care of themselves, and to respond rather than react to difficult behavior of their child. Short-acting methylphenidate will be administered individually and monitored by a child psychiatrist. Assessments will take place at pre-test, post-test, and at follow-up 1 and 2 (respectively 4 and 10 months after the start of treatment). Informants are parents, children, teachers, and researchers.

DISCUSSION:
This study will inform mental health care professionals and health insurance companies about the clinical and cost effectiveness of mindfulness training for children and adolescents with ADHD and their parents compared to the effectiveness of methylphenidate. Limitations and several types of bias that are anticipated for this study are discussed.

TRIAL REGISTRATION:
Dutch Trial Register: NTR4206. Registered 11 October 2013.