

Mindfulness Training Can Promote Healthy Choices

An eating plan called the DASH diet can lead to heart-healthy changes, like lower blood pressure. The diet encourages eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and avoiding saturated fats. But despite its known benefits, many people have trouble sticking to this eating plan. A new study tested whether mindfulness training might help people follow the DASH diet.

Mindfulness is a focus on the present moment. It makes you more aware of what's going on inside and around you. The training program taught people mindfulness skills. These include yoga, meditation, and self-awareness. It also stressed taking other steps to lower blood pressure. Such steps include increasing physical activity and taking blood pressure medicines.

The study enrolled about 200 volunteers with high blood pressure. Half received usual medical care. The rest received mindfulness training. They were asked to perform mindfulness practices at home for at least 45 minutes a day, six days a week. They also attended weekly classes and other group training.

After six months, people in the mindfulness group had a significant drop in blood pressure compared to the other group. The mindfulness group also followed the DASH diet more closely. And they had greater awareness of their body's signals, like hunger cues.

“The program gives participants the tools to make heart-healthy diet changes that can lower their blood pressure and decrease their risk of cardiovascular disease,” says study leader Dr. Eric B. Loucks at Brown

University. The researchers are now testing different adjustments to the training program.