

A “Burnout Prevention” Tool for Improving Healthcare Providers’ Health and Wellbeing: Mantram Repetition

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Objectives: At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to . . .

1. Define and describe the origins of a portable “burnout prevention” tool called mantram repetition intervention.
2. Outline the practices of slowing down and one-pointed attention as complementary strategies to manage stressful demands in the workplace.
3. Highlight research evidence showing some of the health-related outcomes from the mantram intervention program in different populations.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. **What is a mantram?** A mantram is a spiritual word, phrase, or brief prayer that we repeat silently to ourselves to calm the body, quiet the mind and improve concentration to restore the spirit.
2. **Can I use any word or phrase?** We recommend using a word or phrase that has spiritual connections and has been handed down for generations—it has passed the “test of time.”
3. **How do I choose a mantram?** See list on next page. Pick one that has a positive feeling, meaning or even sound. Try it out and see how it feels to you.
4. **How do I use a mantram?** Use it simply by repeating it to yourself as often as you can—silently, aloud, or in writing.
5. **When can I use it?** Anytime! In the beginning, repeat it when you don’t need it. With practice, you’ll be able to use it during stressful times. Repeat it every night before sleep, when you are waiting in lines, while walking.
6. **How often will I need to use my mantram?** The more you use it, the better results you’ll notice. Build the mental muscle of your mind.
7. **Will it help me feel less stress? To sleep better? To improve quality of life?** With practice and persistence, yes! The more you use it, the better you’ll feel, think, and be.



How to Choose a Mantram

Much care should be taken in choosing a mantram. Take your time and choose it wisely. Avoid words that evoke negative associations or bad memories. Choose one that appeals to you or offers strength and support. Choose one that is compatible with your religious background and/or spiritual beliefs. Some people have no difficulty choosing a mantram, such as when a word or phrase jumps out at them immediately. Others have to “try it on” and practice repeating it silently for a few days or even weeks, to see how it feels, only to discover that when they decided to pick a new one—they couldn’t! Their minds automatically reverted to repeating the first one! Using that mantram had already become a habit.

Using a Mantram for Slowing Down

Our culture values speed and doing many things at once or multi-tasking. People groan that there are “not enough hours in the day” to accomplish all they want. Such thinking promotes a sense of urgency and the need to hurry through life. Slowing down involves discrimination. Yes, there are many things to attend to—daily maintenance of household and career, caring for relationships with family and friends. Discrimination is needed to decide what is most important, and then do those things at a moderate pace to avoid carelessness and error. Contrary to what most of us believe, slowing down means efficiency! One makes fewer mistakes, has fewer accidents, and becomes more creative.

Discrimination really means setting priorities and learning to “let go” of the non-essentials. This alone takes time for reflection and evaluation, and for some people, it involves risk-taking. It may feel threatening to evaluate one’s pace and realize the need to change and slow down. Nevertheless, slowing down involves making a conscious effort to choose wisely each day and in each activity—all aspects of life. The end result is living more fully, consciously, and intentionally.

Using a Mantram for Developing One-Pointed Attention or Mindfulness

Mantram repetition forces the mind inherently to become one-pointed with focused attention and serves to raise awareness of the thinking process. Many times, people are unaware of their thoughts and how poor decisions and bad habits are made. The mantram is a very concrete, practical tool whereby “you know when you are repeating it, and you know when you are *not*.” Each time your mind wanders and you bring it back to focus on the mantram, you have an opportunity to increase mindfulness and your ability to control attention. Attention, explained in this way, is a valuable resource that is often wasted. Just as sunlight can be focused through a magnifying glass to create a laser sharp point capable of burning a leaf, attention can be focused on completing one task at a time with efficiency and carefulness.

Stages of Mantram Practice



List of Recommended Mantrams*

Mantrams (pronunciation)	Description
Om mani padme hum (Ohm mah-nee pahd-may hume)	An invocation to the jewel (Self), in the lotus of the heart
Namo Butsaya (Nah-mo Boot-see-yah)	I bow to the Buddha
My God and My All	St. Francis of Assisi's phrase
Maranatha (Mah-rah-nah-tha)	Lord of the Heart (Aramaic)
Kyrie Eleison (Kir-ee-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone)	Lord have mercy
Christe Eleison (Kreest-ay Ee-lay-ee-sone)	Christ have mercy
Jesus, Jesus	Son of God
Hail Mary or Ave Maria	Mother of Jesus
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me	Jesus Prayer
Rama (Rah-mah)	Eternal joy within (Gandhi's mantram)
Om Namah Shivaya (Ohm Nah-mah Shee-vah-yah)	Invocation to beauty and fearlessness
Om Prema (Ohm Pray-Mah)	A call for universal love
Om Shanti (Ohm Shawn-tee)	Invocation to eternal peace
Shalom (Shah-lome)	Peace, completeness
So Hum (So Hum)	I am that Self within
Barukh Atah Adonoi (Bah-rookh At-tah Ah-doh-nigh)	Blessed art Thou, King of the Universe
Ribono Shel Olam (Ree-boh-no Shel O-lahm)	Master of the Universe
Bismallah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim (Beese-mah-lah ir-Rah-mun ir-Rah-heem)	In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate
O Wakan Tanka (Wah-Kahn Tahn-Kah)	Great Spirit

*used in research studies

Ways to Use Your Mantram

While waiting

- For a job interview, or in a grocery or ticket line
- For the bus, plane, train, taxi, or other transportation
- For a doctor's appointment or lab tests
- For people who are late

While doing mechanical tasks that don't require one's full attention

- Washing dishes, sweeping, vacuuming, dusting
- Lawn mowing, raking, gardening, watering plants
- Brushing teeth, combing hair, bathing or showering
- Sawing, digging, hauling, painting

While exercising

- Walking or jogging, swimming or bike riding
- Doing any repeated exercise

When dealing with annoying situations

- Getting cut off in traffic
- Tackling an unpleasant job
- Struggling with insomnia or nightmares
- Dealing with difficult people
- While on hold on the telephone
- When bored

Other times

- Before meals or going to sleep
- While in the presence of a dying person
- While dealing with pain, illness, or surgery
- When dealing with likes or dislikes
- For ruminating thoughts, compulsions and/or addictions

To manage unwanted emotions

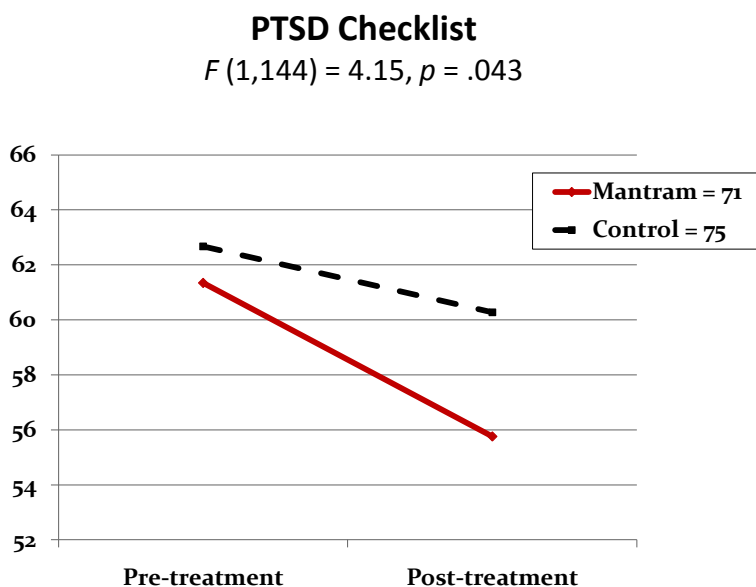
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|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| • Depression | • Frustration | • Anger |
| • Fear | • Anxiety | • Guilt |
| • Resentment | • Impatience | • Irritability |
| • Greed | • Jealousy | • Over-excitement |

Research Abstract

Efficacy of Mantram Repetition Program on Symptoms in Veterans with PTSD

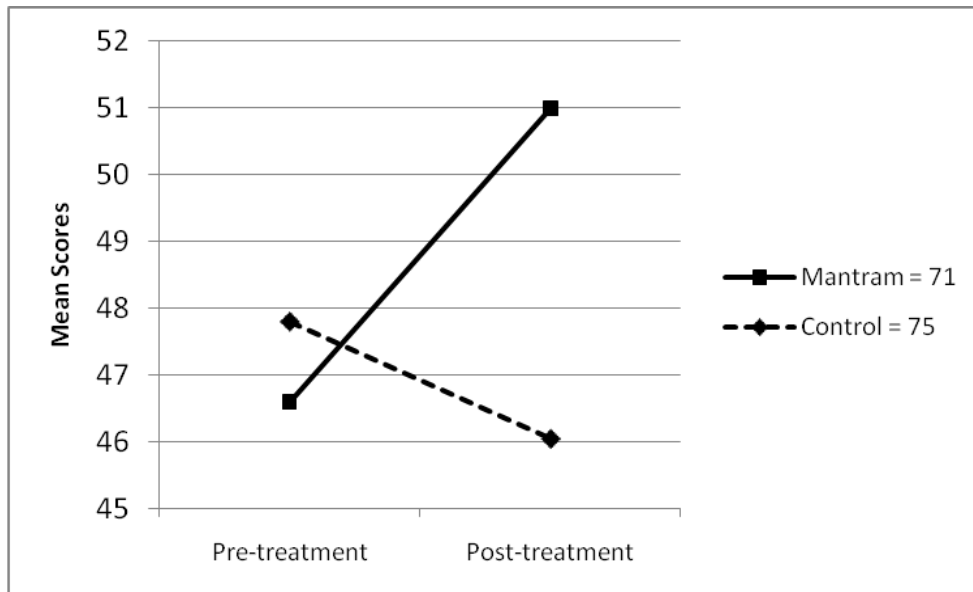
We compared health outcomes of the Mantram Repetition program to usual care in 136 outpatient combat Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Outcomes included PTSD symptom severity, psychological distress, spiritual well-being and quality of life. Participants were randomly assigned to usual care plus mantram ($n=66$) or usual care only ($n=70$). The mantram group reported significant reductions in PTSD symptom severity using the PTSD Checklist ($p < .03$, $d = .34$). At post-treatment, interviewers determined that 24% of veterans in the mantram group had a clinically meaningful improvement in PTSD symptoms compared to 12% of controls. Depression, quality of life and spiritual well being improved significantly in the mantram group compared to controls.

Bormann, J.E., Thorp, S., Wetherell, J.L., Golshan, S., Fellows, I., Lang, A., Gershwin, M., Kelly, A., Bone, P., & Belding, W. (2009). Efficacy of a Spiritually-Based Mantram Intervention on Quality of Life in Veterans with Military-Related PTSD [abstract]. HSR&D 2009 National Meeting, February 11-13, 2009, Baltimore, MD.



Study funded by VA Health Services Research & Development, Nursing Research Initiative 04-041.

Figure 2. Mindfulness Attention Awareness in Groups Over Time: Intent-to-Treat Analyses⁺ in Veterans with Military-Related PTSD

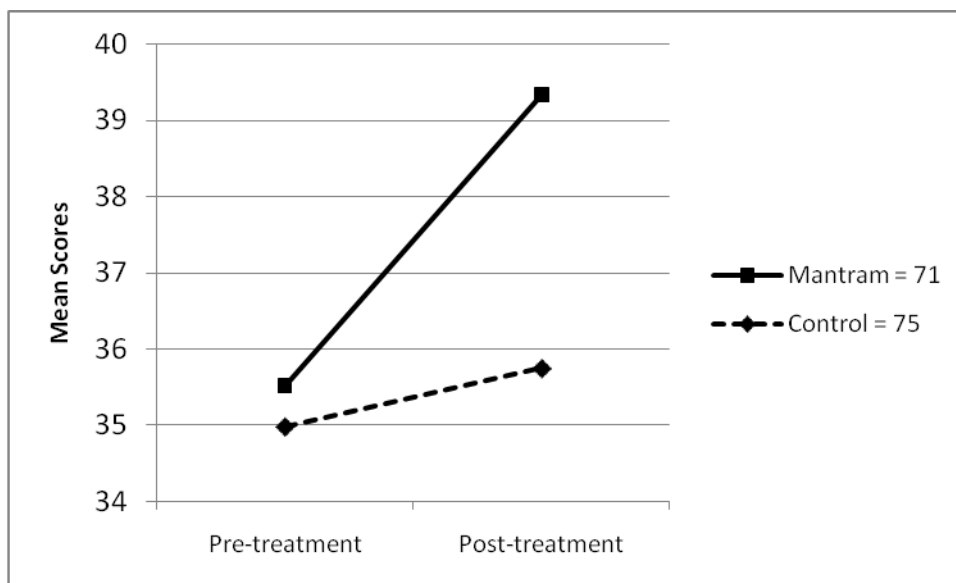


*Mindfulness = Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

Higher scores mean greater mindfulness

⁺ $F(1,134) = 9.91, p = .002$, medium effect size

Figure 3. Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction* in Groups Over Time: Intent- to-Treat⁺ in Veterans with Military-Related PTSD



*Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Questionnaire (General Activities) Short Form
Higher scores mean greater quality of life

⁺ $F(1,134) = 9.33, p = .003$, medium effect size

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