

## The Focus Project: A Mindfulness Approach to HIV Treatment Side Effects

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### Project Description

The Focus Project, funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the NIH, is a randomized controlled trial to test the efficacy of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) intervention in reducing HIV treatment side effects and side effect-related distress.

The intervention is a standardized series of eight weekly MBSR sessions, two to three hours long, held at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. The course also includes daily home assignments of formal and informal meditation practice. The findings from this study will provide evidence that MBSR may allow more conscious and adaptive coping behavior that reduces HIV treatment side effect-related distress.

We will enroll 100 HIV+ adults taking antiretroviral medications, and will evaluate the impact of the MBSR intervention on side effects, quality of life and medication adherence. Participants are assessed at baseline and at three- and six-month follow-up periods. Psychosocial and behavioral variables are assessed via computerized (ACASI/CAPI) interviews at the CAPS project offices.

MBSR is a program that provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to reduction of stress and medical and psychological symptoms. MBSR draws on centuries-old meditation practices, particularly Buddhist Vipassana and Zen practices, but adapts these practices to a Western audience. It aims to teach participants to respond to stressful situations “mindfully” – a state in which one focuses on the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it without getting caught up in thoughts that are about the situation or emotional reactions – to enable people to respond to the situation making conscious choices instead of automatic responses.

### Significance

Challenges associated with antiretroviral therapy for HIV, such as treatment side effects, impact quality of life and adherence to care, and they influence decisions about health care. Decreases in medical and psychological symptoms have been observed following MBSR in a wide range of illness contexts, but the approach has not been applied rigorously to HIV. Addressing HIV treatment side effects through MBSR is a logical yet untested next step in complementary and alternative medicine research.

**Project End Date:** August 2009