RHEUMATOLOGY

Hypnosis for Fibromyalgia

The efficacy of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has already been proven effective in helping patients with fibromyalgia (FM) reduce pain and fatigue and improve physical functioning and mood. Adding hypnosis can boost these results even more and for longer, say researchers from the Hospital Universitari de Tarragona Joan XXIII; the Multidimentional Pain Research Group, IISPV; and the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, all in Tarragona, Spain.

In their study, 93 patients with FM were assigned to 1 of 3 groups: CBT, CBT with hypnosis, or standard care (pharmacologic treatment, including analgesics, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and myorelaxants). The CBT-alone group received standard care plus 14 weekly 120-minute CBT treatment sessions, all but 1 conducted in a group format. The CBT program covered education about FM, cognitive restructuring skills, CBT for primary insomnia, assertiveness training, activity pacing and scheduling, goal setting, and relapse prevention. The patients also received an audio CD for home practice.

Patients in the CBT-plus-hypnosis group received the same standard care and CBT, but instead of autogenic trainings, they received training in self-hypnosis using visualization and self-reinforcement. They were taught, for instance, to imagine an analgesic liquid stream filtering through the skin and reaching different parts of the body.

All patients were asked to record their home practice of the program components. Pain intensity, catastrophizing, psychologic distress, functionality, and sleep disturbances were assessed before treatment, immediately after treatment, and at 3 and 6 months.

Eighty-seven patients (94%) finished the study treatment; at 6 months, data from 71 patients were available for assessment: 22 of the standard-care group, 26 of the CBT group, and 23 of the CBT-plus-hypnosis group.

CBT produced improvements in several outcomes compared with standard care; adding hypnosis enhanced the effectiveness. CBT plus hypnosis markedly reduced pain scores not only immediately after treatment but also over the long-term. At baseline, patients in the standard-care group scored pain intensity as 6.9; at 6 months the score was 6.8. By contrast, pain intensity in the CBT group dropped from 6.1 at baseline to 5.8 at 6 months and from 6.6 to 5.8 in the hypnosis group. Catastrophizing and psychologic distress also declined significantly, whereas functionality and sleep improved.

With or without hypnosis, the CBT patients improved progressively over time compared with the standard-care patients, perhaps because of the reduction in sleep disturbances, the researchers say.

Source: Castel A, Cascón R, Padrol A, Sala J, Rull M. *J Pain.* 2012;13(3):255-265.
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