THE TREATMENT OF INSOMNIA BY THE TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION PROGRAM

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The Transcendental Meditation program was found to be an effective means to reduce insomnia. —EDITORS

This study utilized pretreatment, posttreatment, and two follow-up self-report measures to evaluate the effects of the Transcendental Meditation program in the treatment of insomnia in ten chronic insomniacs. The results indicate that the subjects required a significantly shorter time to fall asleep after learning Transcendental Meditation and that this result was stable over time.

INTRODUCTION

Insomnia, the inability to sleep, probably constitutes one of mankind's most disturbing and debilitating problems and is a condition that most people experience at some time in their lives. As a result, there has been a proliferation of suggested treatments in the literature documenting the search for an efficient, effective, and simple method for relieving sleeplessness.

Unfortunately, previous attempts to alleviate insomnia have met with limited success due to their short-lasting results, methodological complexities, and therapeutic complications. The purpose of the present study was to investigate a new program for treating insomnia—the Transcendental Meditation program—which may be more efficient and effective than previous approaches.

Transcendental Meditation is an easily learned mental technique that allows the individual to transcend the boundaries of ordinary thought processes (7, 8). It is fundamentally different from all methods of mind control or physical manipulation involving concentration, contemplation, discipline, or extensive training. The technique involves the progressive refinement of the nervous system through the regular alternation of deep rest and activity. In other words, just as sleep and dreaming are required to relieve certain stresses and fatigue, Transcendental Meditation may be essential to relieve "deep-rooted stresses and anxieties" in the nervous system (7, 8).

Transcendental Meditation has been shown to significantly increase skin resistance, which indicates a state of deep relaxation and a reduction of anxiety and emotional disturbances (12, 13, 14, 15, 16). This physiological evidence is complemented by a body of psychological research that has indicated that anxiety in meditators is reduced quickly and remains at a low level as the practice is continued (2, 4, 9, 10, 11).

Such findings are particularly relevant to the problem of insomnia. Although opinions vary as to the causes of insomnia, anxiety is the factor most frequently identified as the cause (6). Scientific research indicates that the Transcendental Meditation program is effective in dissipating anxiety; therefore, one might expect this program to naturally alleviate insomnia.

METHOD

The subjects were five male and five female adults, all of whom were referred to the experimenter by physicians, who diagnosed them as suffering from chronic insomnia. Each subject was interviewed by the experimenter. At this time the experimental nature of the project was emphasized, and the subjects were asked to be as objective as possible throughout the project. The experimenter also obtained brief biographical information and a detailed account of the history and form of each subject's insomnia.

The subjects were given a set of 30 identical forms on which to record the time they went to bed each evening and the estimated time it took them to fall asleep (to be recorded on the following morning). At the end of this 30-day period, the subjects were individually taught the Transcendental Meditation technique by a qualified instructor. Following the usual procedure the correctness of the practice was verified each day for three days and then at intervals of ten days throughout the study.

On the day subjects began Transcendental Meditation, they were given an additional set of 30 forms on which to record the time it took them to fall asleep (in the same manner as before). At 60 and 90 days after learning the technique, the subjects again recorded, for a ten-day period each time, how long it took them to fall asleep.

RESULTS

The mean times before the onset of sleep during the pretest, posttest, and follow-up periods is summarized in table 1 and fig. 1. Mean times decreased from 75.6 minutes during the 30-day pre-TM period to 15.2 minutes during the 30-day post-TM period and remained low during the ten-day follow-up periods at 60 and 90 days after beginning TM.

Tests of significance were applied using the method of orthogonal contrasts. There was a significant difference ($p < .001$) between the pre- and posttest periods and no significant difference between the posttest and follow-up periods.

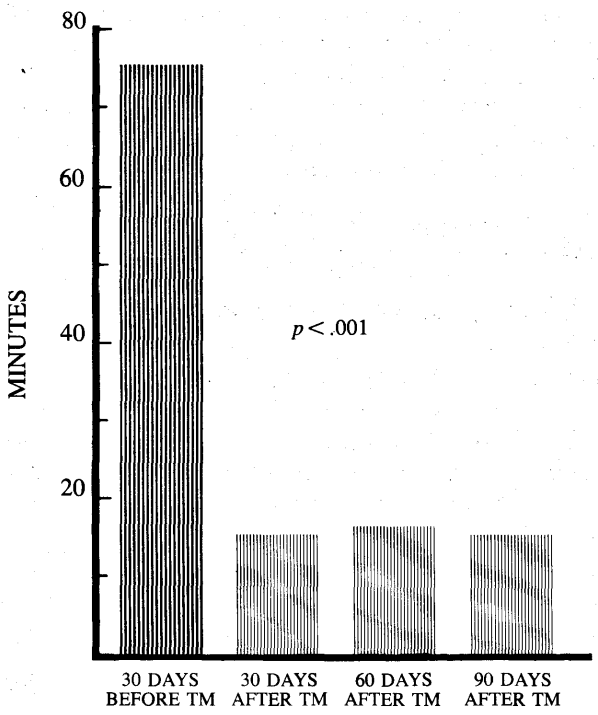

FIG. 1. DECREASED TIME TAKEN TO FALL ASLEEP. The mean time (in minutes) before the onset of sleep for chronic insomniacs is indicated for 30 days before learning TM, for the first 30 days after learning TM, and for ten-day periods 60 and 90 days after learning TM.

TABLE 1

TIME BEFORE SLEEP ONSET
(N = 10)

TEST PERIOD	LENGTH OF TEST PERIOD (days)	MEAN TIME/ SUBJECT/NIGHT (min to onset of sleep)
Pre-TM (days −30 to 0)	30	75.6
Post-TM (days 0 to 30)	30	15.2
Follow-up I (days 60 to 70)	10	16.3
Follow-up II (days 90 to 100)	10	15.1

DISCUSSION

The results, as shown in table 1, are clear and dramatic. The pretest-posttest comparison indicates that the subjects estimated it took them a significantly shorter time to fall asleep after learning the Transcendental Meditation technique. Not only did TM initially alleviate insomnia, but the follow-up data demonstrate that the effects of the technique were stable over time (i.e., there was no incidence of relapse).

It may be argued that the self-reporting method is vulnerable to both intentional and unintentional bias. However, this argument applies more to global reports of improvement than to the specific daily logs used in this and similar studies (1, 3, 5).

Future studies will be necessary to determine the factors responsible for the success of the Transcendental Meditation program as a therapeutic treatment for insomnia. Since this program has been demonstrated to reduce anxiety, fatigue, nervousness, and stress, the cause of its therapeutic efficacy appears to be an all-encompassing restoration of physiology and psychology, rather than merely a single specific effect.

The results reported in this study are encouraging for a variety of reasons. First, the TM program was dramatically successful in treating insomnia. In addition, Transcendental Meditation itself has many favorable characteristics. It is taught in a standardized manner by qualified instructors and is easy to learn; it takes little time both to learn and practice, and it does not induce any unfavorable side effects. TM could therefore be universally and easily applied as a nondrug treatment for insomnia under most circumstances.

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