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Clinical Hypnosis vs. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: What's Better for Managing Hot Flashes?

New scoping review suggests superior effectiveness of clinical hypnosis in reducing hot flashes and improving associated symptoms and quality of life

CLEVELAND, Ohio (Sept 10, 2024)—Nonhormone options for hot flashes and other menopause symptoms are growing in popularity, especially for women who cannot take hormones due to health complications. Cognitive behavioral therapy and clinical hypnosis are common nonhormone treatment options. According to a new scoping review, however, one is more effective than the other. Results of the scoping review will be presented at the 2024 Annual Meeting of The Menopause Society in Chicago September 10-14.

Recognizing that a percentage of menopausal women cannot take hormone therapy either because of health restrictions, such as being a breast cancer survivor, or because of their concerns regarding the potential risks of hormones, in 2023 The Menopause Society published its Nonhormone Therapy Position Statement. Among other things, the Position Statement addressed both cognitive behavioral therapy and clinical hypnosis.

A new scoping review which synthesized the findings from 23 studies spanning from 1996 until 2022, however, was designed to compare the effectiveness of these two treatment options. Of the total studies reviewed, 8 had administered clinical hypnosis and 15 administered cognitive behavioral therapy for the treatment of hot flashes.

The researchers found that clinical hypnosis interventions consistently demonstrated clinically significant efficacy in reducing hot flash frequency and severity, as well as improving quality of life, sleep quality, and mood. Specifically, clinical hypnosis showed a significant reduction of more than 60%. In contrast, cognitive behavioral therapy interventions showed mixed findings, with minimal impact on hot flash frequency reduction, although they did prove helpful in reducing the daily interference and stress associated with hot flashes.

More detailed results will be discussed at the 2024 Annual Meeting of The Menopause Society as part of the abstract presentation entitled “Clinical hypnosis and cognitive behavioral therapy for hot flashes: a scoping review.”

“Clinical hypnosis is the first behavioral intervention to achieve significant reductions of physiologically recorded hot flashes,” says Vanessa Muniz, lead author from Baylor University. “This suggests that hypnosis may act through mechanisms beyond response expectancy or placebo effects, potentially altering activity in the medial preoptic area of the hypothalamus.”

Based on the results, the researchers suggest that future research should explore neurophysiological mechanisms of hypnosis and innovative delivery methods such as smartphone apps, and tailor interventions to individual characteristics for optimized outcomes in managing hot flashes.

“Since hot flashes are one of the most common bothersome symptoms of menopause, evaluating the available treatment options, including the nonhormone options, are important so we can provide our patients with the option that will work best for them, says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, medical director for The Menopause Society.

Both Vanessa Muniz and Dr. Faubion are available for interviews prior to the Annual Meeting.

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit the newly redesigned www.menopause.org.

The Menopause Society (formerly The North American Menopause Society) is dedicated to empowering healthcare professionals and providing them with the tools and resources to improve the health of women during the menopause transition and beyond. As the leading authority on menopause since 1989, the nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization serves as the independent, evidence-based resource for healthcare professionals, researchers, the media, and the public and leads the conversation about improving women’s health and healthcare experiences. To learn more, visit menopause.org.