

# Mindfulness-based therapy for sexual impairments in women: A literature review

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## Introduction

Sexual impairments in women are common, and efficacious treatments for them are needed. Interest has grown in **mindfulness-based therapy (MBT)**, a potential treatment proposed by researchers for sexual impairments in women<sup>1-7</sup>.

### What is MBT and why should it improve sexual functioning in women?

Mindfulness is an ancient Eastern practice that focuses on orienting to the present moment with nonjudgmental awareness<sup>8</sup>.

MBT encourages women to direct their attention to the present, thus increasing their attention to sensations during sex. By focusing on these sensations, women are less likely to focus on distractions that negatively influence their sexual arousal response<sup>1</sup>. **Treating negative thoughts associated with arousal as “products of the mind” allow them to not further pursue these thoughts<sup>2</sup>.**

The current literature review aimed to examine the impact of MBT on sexual functioning, sexual distress, and relationship functioning. While research on the subject is limited, a literature review was performed of quantitative treatment-outcome studies of MBT for sexual impairments. A total of seven treatment-outcome studies were examined.

## Method

- The PsychINFO database was used to collect data.
- Inclusionary criteria: Studies must include a mindfulness-based intervention, quantitative results, and validated measures.
- Seven articles were included in the present study, with a total of 346 participants.
- Both effect size and statistical significance values were examined.

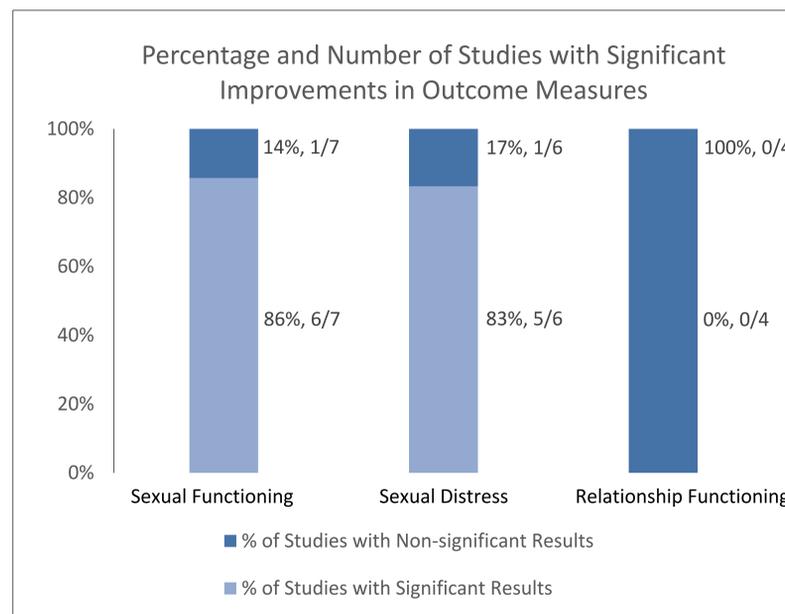
Key Terms:  
Mindfulness  
& Sex

PsychINFO  
Results: 94  
Articles

Articles  
meeting  
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## Results

- **Figure 1** displays the percentage of studies that found significant improvements in outcome measures.
- **Figure 2** shows the calculated effect sizes that indicate the magnitude of the effect of MBT on sexual functioning, sexual distress, and relationship functioning compared to a waitlist control group.
- Compared to waitlist controls, the majority of studies showed a medium to large effect of MBT on sexual functioning. MBT had a small effect on sexual distress, and no effect on relationship functioning.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of studies with a significant improvement in outcome measures from pre-treatment to post-treatment.

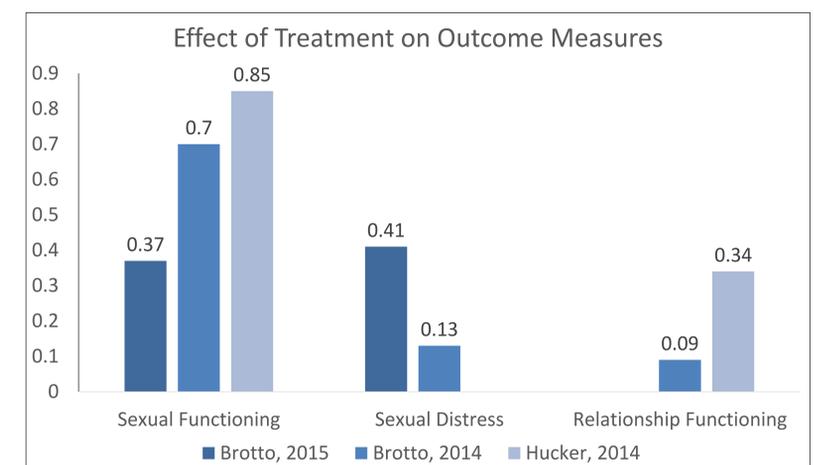
## Discussion

### Does mindfulness work?

MBT was shown to have a significant impact on sexual functioning and sexual distress from pre-treatment to post-treatment. There was no significant impact of MBT on relationship functioning. Participants were not required to be distressed about their relationship at the beginning of treatment, but were required to have a sexual impairment and be sexually distressed. This may be why a significant improvement in relationship functioning was not found.

### What is next for mindfulness research?

The current review was limited by inconsistencies between studies. There was a large amount of variance in the type of control group used, the length of treatment, and other factors, such as whether or not partners are involved in treatment. MBT should be implemented when all these conditions are standardized amongst studies in order to best examine the effects of MBT.



**Figure 2:** Effect of treatment on outcome measures (in Cohen's *d*) for studies with available data.

## Literature Cited

- <sup>1</sup> Brotto et al. (2008). A psychoeducational intervention for sexual dysfunction in women with gynecologic cancer. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.
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\* Note: Studies 3-8 are examined in the literature review.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center at California State University, Monterey Bay.