

Educating Women about Complementary and Alternative Medicine Interventions to Promote Wellness in the Postpartum Period

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPLICATION

Misty Howland, Angel Schmidt, Kelsey Stoinski | University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire College of Nursing and Health Sciences | BSN Nursing Honors

ABSTRACT

This nursing honors project centers around educating women about the causes and effects of stress, and utilizing complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) interventions to promote wellness in the postpartum period and throughout life. A scholarly literature review identified evidence-based CAM interventions, such as relaxation techniques, that promote wellness and effectively decrease stress in postpartum women. An article of specific interest is entitled *Relaxation during pregnancy: What are the benefits for mother, fetus, and newborn?* (Fink, 2012). The authors reviewed several research studies related to relaxation techniques, such as massage, guided imagery, and yoga, and discussed their effects on mothers and infants before and after birth. Evidence resulting from the literature review identifies the need to educate postpartum women on relaxation techniques to help promote health and wellness. A presentation and pamphlet detailing the evidence-based relaxation techniques will be used to educate attendees at various local community and/or healthcare settings, to include but not limited to YMCAs, daycares, new mother organizations, and birthing units. The goal of this work is to deliver CAM intervention information in the hopes of better supporting women's wellness throughout the postpartum period and thereafter.

THE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 4 out of 5 new mothers experience new feelings of sadness, negativity, and mood swings (Do, 2016). This is commonly known as "Baby Blues." Research has shown that infants of mothers who experience these depressive symptoms may have insecure attachment along with delayed cognitive, social, and emotional development. This is believed to be related to the increase of stress and anxiety experienced by the mother in the postpartum period (Ginsburg, 2008).

It takes time to research and analyze evidence-based data regarding CAM therapies and stress reduction; this is time that new mothers simply do not have. The team has taken the initiative to research, analyze, critique, and condense this data into an integrative educational presentation. This presentation is intended to educate mothers within the community.

The purpose of educating mothers on CAM interventions is to enhance mothers' overall wellness and promote attachment between mother and infant.

MATERIALS & METHOD

In preparation, the team conducted a literature review focused on the PICO question, "Do CAM integrative therapies used by postpartum mothers decrease stress and improve wellness during the postpartum period?" Keywords included: mothers, stress, postpartum, complementary and alternative medicine, exercise, and relaxation. Through careful review of the literature on CAM interventions, the team selected eleven articles that served as a framework for their project. In examining this research, the team was able to identify five key interventions which include guided imagery, exercise, breathing techniques, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).

The data and information obtained from this literature review was incorporated into a community-based power point presentation and an informational pamphlet. This pamphlet contains key points from the presentation and additional resources (i.e. YouTube links and social support groups). This information will be shared by the team within various community settings.

DESCRIPTION – CAM INTERVENTIONS

Complementary and alternative medicinal therapies are designed to be holistic in the sense of meeting a person's health needs not only on a physical level, but also on spiritual and psychological levels. CAM therapies are ideal for mothers with a busy schedule because they can be done at home or on the go.

GUIDED IMAGERY

Guided imagery is a series of various techniques that are used to guide a person in imagining/visualizing sensations or images in the mind with the hopes of reducing stress and anxiety. The use of guided imagery has been shown to be beneficial in the treatment and control of anxiety, depressive symptoms, pain reduction, and can help increase one's sense of well-being (Rees, 1993). According to *Guided Imagery: An Innovative Approach to Improving Maternal Sleep Quality*, after 8 weeks there was a positive correlation between the use of guided imagery and the ability to cope with stress and anxiety in mothers (Schaffer et al., 2013). With this knowledge, the team integrates a short guided imagery session into their presentation and informs attendees about the benefits of CAM therapies in stress management.

CONSCIOUS DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING (DEEP BREATHING)

When a person experiences a stressful event or moment in their life, the body naturally tenses in response to the stress-inducing stimuli. One way to combat this is through diaphragmatic breathing. This type of breathing is focused on using the primary muscle for breathing, the diaphragm. According to the book *A Clinical Guide to the Treatment of the Human Stress Response*, deep breathing is one of the oldest and effective treatments for excessive stress (Everly and Lating, 2013).

EXERCISE

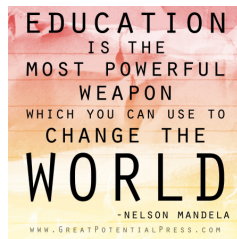
Exercise aids to relieve stress by releasing neurotransmitters, endorphins, and endocannabinoids that have a positive effect on the brain. These chemicals are often called the "feel good chemicals." Not only does exercise release these feel good chemicals, it can also help the individual gain confidence, increase their social network, and serves as a healthy coping mechanism (Depression, n.d.). Women who engaged in physical activity during pregnancy and in the postpartum period experienced less stress (Kowalska, Olszowa, Markowska, Teplik, & Rymaszewska, 2014).

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Meditation, in accordance with the practice of mindfulness, can induce relaxation while reducing stress by lowering blood pressure and relieving tension and anxiety. Meditating for 30 minutes a day for 8 weeks has been shown to thicken the areas of the brain that involve emotional regulation, compassion, self-referencing, and the regulation of neurotransmitters (Moffic, 2016). Additionally, mindfulness focuses on the practice of paying close, deliberate, and open-hearted attention to what is happening in one's external and internal environment, and allows for the individual to be aware of what is happening in the moment. Being mindful aids individuals in their ability to concentrate, leading to a greater satisfaction in life (Hughes et al., 2009). According to *Mindfulness: Being Present in the Moment*, mindfulness meditation can reduce the risk of a new mother developing postpartum depression. It can also help to better manage pain, stress, and anxiety in addition to increasing her overall wellness and attention to her infant (Frazer, 2015).

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

When the human body undergoes stress, whether physical or psychological, the natural response elicited is constriction and tightening of the muscles. When this occurs, it results in tension throughout the body, causing pain and irritation. The process of PMR is focused on training the body to recognize the difference between a muscle that is relaxed and one that is not. This is achieved through a series of exercises that are directed to the major muscle groups of the body and instructs the participants to first tense the muscle group and then relax that same muscle group. In the article, *The effect of progressive muscle relaxation on daily cortisol secretion*, the researchers found a positive correlation between the use of PMR and a decrease in salivary secretion of cortisol, one of the major hormonal indicators of stress (Chellew, Evans, Fornes-Vives et al., 2015).



DISCUSSION

Research has shown that it can take up to twenty years for new evidence-based findings to be put into clinical practice (Translating, n.d.). As a result, the goal for the project was to compile the latest research regarding CAM interventions in the postpartum period and bring it to mothers in a community setting.

GUIDED IMAGERY

The team integrates this CAM intervention into their presentation by leading the attendees in a short guided imagery script, which allows those present to experience the relaxing effects of this technique. Before the script is read, the team requests those present to close their eyes and take a deep breath to initiate relaxation of the mind and body. After the script is read, the team asks for feedback from those in attendance as to their experience with this intervention.

CONSCIOUS DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING (DEEP BREATHING)

This topic is integrated throughout the presentation and is specifically addressed through a one minute deep breathing exercise. The presenters ask the attendees to close their eyes, relax their mind and body, and follow the team's prompts through the breathing exercise. Following the exercise, the team asks those present to describe the effects of the relaxation techniques and provide feedback.

EXERCISE

The team discusses the benefits of exercise along with how they can perform these activities with their children. A short video is played for those present to demonstrate some of the techniques they can use at home.

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Meditation and mindfulness is integrated throughout the presentation. Key concepts of this intervention are discussed within the presentation.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

This intervention is introduced by the team to those present by playing a short portion of a video demonstrating how to perform this CAM therapy. After the video, the team initiates a short discussion on the key concepts of PMR in decreasing stress.

Resources and Targeted Audience

Resources and key points regarding these interventions are distributed to the attendees in the form of a pamphlet. The team presents to mothers, families, and professionals at community daycares, YMCA's, new mother organizations, birthing units, as well as others by request.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rachael Haupt-Harrington, DNP, RN, WHNP-BC
Debra Hofmann, DNP, APNP, RN, ACNS-BC, CNE
Rita Sperstad, EDD, MSN, RN
University of Wisconsin Eau Claire College of Nursing - Honors Program
Celebration of Excellence in Research and Creative Activity (CERCA) - Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Sigma Theta Tau International - Delta Phi Chapter

REFERENCES

- Chellew, K., Evans, P., Fornes-Vives, J., Pérez, G., & Garcia-Banda, G. (2015). The effect of progressive muscle relaxation on daily cortisol secretion. *Stress: The International Journal On The Biology Of Stress*, 18(5), 538-544. doi:10.3109/10253890.2015.1053454
- Depression and anxiety: Exercise eases symptoms. (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2017, from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495>
- Do I Have Postpartum Depression? (2016, May 18). Retrieved April 25, 2017, from <http://americanpregnancy.org/first-year-of-life/forms-of-postpartum-depression/>
- Everly, G. S., & Lating, J. M. (2013). *A clinical guide to the treatment of the human stress response*. New York: Springer.
- Fink, N. S., Urech, C., Caveletti, M., & Alder, J. (2012). Relaxation during pregnancy: what are the benefits for mother, fetus, and the newborn? A systematic review of the literature. *Journal Of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing*, 26(4), 296-306. doi:10.1097/JP.N.0b013e31823f565b
- Frazer, C., & Stathas, S. A. (2015). Mindfulness: Being Present in the Moment. *International Journal Of Childbirth Education*, 30(2), 77-83.
- Ginsburg, G. S., Baker, E. V., Mullany, B. C., Barlow, A., Goklish, N., Hastings, R., . . . Walkup, J. (2008). Depressive Symptoms Among Reservation-based Pregnant American Indian Adolescents. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 12(5), 110-118. doi:10.1007/s10995-008-0352-2
- Hughes, A., Williams, M., Bardacke, N., Duncan, L., Dimidjian, S., & Goodman, S. (2009). Mindfulness approaches to childbirth and parenting. *British Journal Of Midwifery*, 17(10), 630-635.
- Kowalska, J., Olszowa, D., Markowska, D., Teplik, M., & Rymaszewska, J. (2014). Physical activity and childbirth classes during a pregnancy and the level of perceived stress and depressive symptoms in women after childbirth. *Psychiatria Polska*, 48, 889-900. doi:10.12740/pp/24984
- Moffic, H. S. (2016). Meditation, Managed Care, and Mental Health. *Psychiatric Times*, 33(5), 1-4.
- Rees, B. (1993). An exploratory study of the effectiveness of a relaxation with guided imagery protocol. *Journal Of Holistic Nursing*, 11(3), 271-276.
- Schaffer, L., Jallo, N., Howland, L., James, K., Glaser, D., & Arnell, K. (2013). Guided Imagery. *The Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing*, 27(2), 151-159. doi:10.1097/JP.N.0b013e3182870426
- Translating Research into Practice (TRIP)-II | AHRQ Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved April 17, 2017, from <https://archive.ahrq.gov/research/findings/factsheets/translating/tripfac/trip2fac.html>