Getting started with Taiji – exploring beginners’ expectations towards Taiji

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Background: As reported in various clinical trials patients’ expectations have been shown to possess a high influence on treatment results. However, by now little attention has been drawn on subjective expectations in preventive interventions such as Taiji. Taiji is a mind-body practice characterized by sequences of gentle and mindful body movements. It has repeatedly been considered as a valuable intervention for stress management. The aim of our study was to evaluate what beginners without previous practical Taiji experience expect from this mind-body practice in general as well as more specifically with regard to stress management.

Materials and Methods: 74 healthy subjects (22 male and 52 female; mean age = 35.4; SD = ± 7.5) applied for a Taiji beginners course (2 x 1h per week for 3 months) and were asked to write down their expectations towards their upcoming Taiji course. Additionally stress management related expectations were measured by rating 15 expectations on a Likert-scale (six-point rating scale ranging from 1 = “not true at all” to 6 = “absolutely true”) to indicate the degree of correspondence with their own expectations. Descriptive data analysis was employed. Associations between socio-demographic factors and stress management related expectations were analysed by using between group t-Tests.

Results: The expectation most mentioned was “get to know Taiji” (n = 42), followed by “tranquillity and peace of mind” (n = 33), “improved handling of stress” (n = 30), “increased body awareness” (n = 26) and “relaxation” (n = 20). Moderate average expectation values were found regarding Taiji related stress reduction (M = 4.44; SD = ± 0.96) and resource activation (M = 4.58; SD = ± 0.68). Subjects without a high-school degree (n = 17) expected a significantly higher stress reduction through Taiji (M = 4.89; SD = ±0.77) than those with a higher education level (n = 57; M = 4.30; SD = ± 0.98; p < .05).

Conclusion: Beginners who are getting started with Taiji mainly expressed knowledge related and mind-body related expectations. Stress reductive expectations were more often mentioned by subjects with less favourable educational background. The consideration of participants’ expectations in future Taiji studies warrants further attention.

Flow experience during Taiji practice – an observational study in healthy subjects

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