

Can a program combining mindfulness and stretching exercises prevent sport injuries among junior elite soccer players?

Andreas Ivarsson¹, Katri Kylmä¹, Urban Johnson¹, Andreas Stenling²,
¹Center of Research on Welfare, Health, and Sport, Halmstad University, Sweden,
²Department of Psychology, Umeå University, Sweden,

INTRODUCTION

To become injured is often related to several negative consequences for the athletes. Examples of negative consequences are decreased well-being, forced termination from sports, and high levels of pain. It is, therefore, warrant to investigate different preventive initiatives effect on injury risk.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which a mindfulness based intervention, based on the Mindful Body method, could reduce the number of sport injuries in a sample of junior elite soccer players.

METHOD

- A total of 34 junior elite soccer players (both males and females), aged between 16 and 19 years, were randomly assigned to a treatment group or an active control group.
- The treatment group took part in a 7-session program, where mindfulness techniques were combined with different stretching exercises. The active control group was offered 7-sessions of sport psychology presentations with a particular focus on soccer.
- A Bayesian logistic regression analysis, with informative priors from Ivarsson et al. (2017), was applied to analyze the results.



RESULTS

- The participants experienced 28 acute injuries in total during the study period.
- The participants in the treatment group had on average 0.65 injuries/person (on average 11.77 days missed from soccer participation), whereas the participants in the control group had on average 1.0 injuries/person (on average 20.35 days missed from soccer participation).
- A Bayesian regression analysis showed that group was a credible predictor of injury frequency ($\beta = .18$, 95% credibility interval = [.04, .32]).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This result, which is in line with results from previous studies (e.g., Ivarsson, Johnson, Andersen, Fallby, & Altemyr, 2015), show that an intervention program focusing on strategies for improving awareness can decrease the risk of becoming injured. Soccer coaches should consider including a combination of mindfulness and stretching exercises into their injury prevention programs.

REFERENCES

- Ivarsson, A., Johnson, U., Andersen, M. B., Fallby, J., & Altemyr, M. (2015). It Pays to Pay Attention: A Mindfulness-Based Program for Injury Prevention with Soccer Players. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 27, 319-334.
- Ivarsson, A., Johnson, U., Andersen, M. B., Tranaeus, U., Stenling, A., & Lindwall, M. (2017). Psychosocial Factors and Sport Injuries: Meta-analyses for Prediction and Prevention. *Sports Medicine*, 47, 353-365.